

DOCTORAL THESIS

The ballet class educating creative dance artists?

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Award date:
2020

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

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The Ballet Class: Educating Creative Dance Artists?

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of PhD**

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2019

Abstract

The ballet class is the primary means of learning about ballet, shaping not just the dancing but the attitudes and perceptions of dancers throughout their careers. In recent years it has been critiqued for lack of creativity, abusive and authoritarian teaching, and as inadequate physical training for today's dancers. This research examines the ballet class as a complex pedagogical phenomenon, an embodied tradition transmitted in practice from one generation to the next. It questions whether and in what ways the class has the potential to be an artistic education for ballet's dancers, teachers and choreographers.

This thesis constructs a picture of the class as a locus for situated practical learning, combining the unconscious absorption of a ballet habitus with more conscious and reflective learning and the acquisition of expertise; considering the contested relationship of technique and artistry in the slow absorption of balletic understanding and skills. This theoretical framework underpins a series of short case studies of classes in the UK for learners over 18 years from beginner to professional, revealing the variety of class content and practice as shaped by such current pressures as irregular employment, the increasing systematisation of ballet training institutions, and the growing influence of sports science and social media. Major themes of aims and purposes, the class as a physical fitness regime, and the importance of its relation to the performance and creation of repertoire, are considered in the wider context of the historical development of ballet's evolving technical knowledge and body of work. A final discussion of pace in teaching and the experience of dancing leads to suggestions and conclusions as to how the class may positively contribute to the development of artistry and creativity in ballet dancers.

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Acknowledgements

Producing this thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of the following people to whom I am profoundly indebted:

It has been a privilege to be part of the University of Roehampton Dance Research community, surrounded by inspiring academics and colleagues undertaking a rich diversity of investigation, testifying to the exciting potential of dance scholarship. Very special thanks to my Director of Studies Professor Emilyn Claid, who has both encouraged and challenged me, and to my supervisor Dr Geraldine Morris for her historical oversight and scrupulous attention to detail; I have really valued their sympathetic guidance in drawing out my thinking and their expert help in framing it in accordance with doctoral requirements. Grateful thanks too to research “buddies” Dr Cristina de Lucas and Dr Deborah Williams, whose friendship and successful completion has given hope to myself and fellow doctoral traveller Cathy Dulin.

Beyond the University of Roehampton I would also like to thank friends and colleagues over the years for their interest, fruitful discussion and wise advice, most recently Professor Susan Jones, Dr Caterina Albano and Dr Jean Knox, as well as peerless ballet pianist Jonathan Still. Particular thanks to my longstanding colleague and friend Jennifer Jackson; our decades of artistic and writing collaboration have done so much to enrich my knowledge and ideas about the field we both love.

My deep gratitude to all those teachers and students who so generously allowed me to observe their practice, and gave up their time to answer my questions; I cherish their insights and hope that I have done justice in presenting their work and commitment. Warmest thanks too to all my students in Oxford who have cheered on my study and tolerated my thinking out loud, and to both them and my colleagues of the “Tully

Collective” for providing trusting environments in which to develop my ideas on teaching in practice.

Lastly I thank my lovely family Pete, Joanna and Ben for their long-suffering support and unstinting encouragement, which has kept me going through this extraordinary process. My parents Joan and Arthur Crow exemplified a love of learning and search for enlightenment through scholarly enquiry which I have done my best to emulate; I dedicate this thesis to their memory.

Introduction

This research stems from my own practice as dancer, choreographer and teacher; it examines the ballet technique class, considering its contribution to the education of dancers as imaginative interpreters and potential ballet choreographers.

The ballet class is the primary and predominant means of learning about ballet as a way of dancing, where not only dancers but also future teachers and choreographers are inducted into ballet's knowledge and community of practice. Ballet dancers continue to practise the class on a regular basis throughout their working lives, and over the course of a career are likely to spend more time in class than in any other dancing activity. Hugely influential yet rarely publicly visible, the class can therefore be seen as the elephant in the room that shapes ballet's aesthetics as an art form and the attitudes of its practitioners before works ever get to the stage.

A composition of dancing to music that the teacher communicates to students for them to interpret, the class encapsulates balletic knowledge in multi-sensory practical activity. Ballet's accumulated repertoire of movements and shapes, principles and concepts are learned here. Yet this shared technical knowledge can vary significantly in its interpretation and manifestation in actual classes. Although within a generally accepted framework of required content, unless following a prescribed syllabus the teacher has freedom to devise a sequence of *enchaînements* (combinations or technical studies) by choosing dance elements, musical accompaniment and, to some extent, order appropriate to the needs of the dancers. Even when using the same material no two classes are identical, they are unique interactions between those present and the dance and music content experienced and shared. This raises a number of questions as to what actually happens in the ballet class, the nature of the learning of ballet and how its knowledge is transmitted; what we know as ballet

dancers and how we know it.

The ballet class is often regarded as essentially physical training in certain specific dance skills. But given its function as a necessary preparation for performance of a historic body of dances as art works, and the generation of new works within the genre of ballet, the questions that I aim to address start from the assumption that it should perhaps be more aptly framed as an embodied artistic education in and through a particular way of dancing, of which physical training is but one aspect.

Ballet as a dance form is in effect an oral tradition transmitted from person to person; its knowledge resides in dancers' embodiment and social memory, and is therefore subject to varying interpretation and construction. Modes of transmission of knowledge in the ballet class include the vocal (verbal and non-verbal); physical demonstration ranging from schematic indication to full execution by the teacher; the use of touch; and the use of musical accompaniment. They do not include reading or writing. Today in a world where ballet's knowledge is increasingly inscribed, recorded on film or notated, and thereby fixed, there is a danger that aspects of the tenuous flexible understandings that are passed from one individual to another, and reinterpreted by new generations of practitioners, may be lost. It therefore seems the right moment closely to analyse the role of the ballet class in this elusive mechanism of transmission, and how it might affect the development of creativity within the form.

Investigating the class raises important methodological issues for the researcher; the challenge of studying what is ephemeral and not inscribed, and of writing accurately and revealingly about an activity which is largely non-verbal not only in its execution, but also in its transmission. Words such as "artistry" and "technique" are widely used by practitioners but infrequently and contentiously defined. This research unpicks such assumptions and usage in an attempt to clarify common or conflicting understandings.

Research aims and questions

This can be encapsulated in three research aims and emerging questions:

- **To unravel what happens in the ballet class; how is balletic knowledge transmitted to the individual, and how are technical and artistic concerns brought together in class content and teaching?**

In my own practice the roles of choreographer and teacher are intertwined, the one informing the other; this fosters a belief that the seedlings of balletic choreographic activity and abilities can be rooted and nurtured in the technique class. The potential for this hinges on the vexed question of what technique is seen to encompass, how it is defined in relationship to the elusive concept of artistry. To understand this, my research considers what the ballet technique class consists of, building a theoretical picture of the characteristics of ballet class knowledge and the ways in which it is organised and delivered. It examines the types of learning and teaching which happen in the ballet technique class, and looks at examples of the knowledges, skills and dispositions that might be developed there. It therefore questions whether the class should be considered training or whether it is more appropriately construed as education. This research argues that the class is a complex pedagogical phenomenon with significant educative potential.

- **To document, discuss, and evaluate examples of current classes; what are their aims and purposes, and how are classes influenced and shaped by historic context and present circumstance?**

From my position as an insider and practitioner in the ballet community, I have observed, experienced and analysed a variety of current classes to study how social/cultural factors, institutional context, shared and diverging understandings, and the aims of teachers and learners may shape the nature of the class. This has

involved examining the role and contribution of technique class teachers as major conduits of balletic knowledge; but also examining the structure and dance content of ballet classes for what knowledge and values may be more deeply embedded within them and shaped by them.

- **To consider how ballet classes might inhibit or encourage the cultivation of interpretative and choreographic abilities, of dancers as creative artists; and the teacher's role in this endeavour.**

My analysis aims to bring insight into those particular aspects of the class that might affect the development of artistic creativity in dancers, and how they might be interrelated or prioritised in different class contexts. How might creative skills be developed and dancers equipped to make new dances within a traditional and codified dance form such as ballet? Now that video technology and notation allow for recording what previously survived and evolved through the memory of those dancing and viewing, ballet is making a transition from oral culture to inscribed body of knowledge with its institutions, gate-keepers and canon. This research considers what may be the benefits and dangers of this shift from fluidity to fixity. It speculates that the open-endedness of oral transmission can in some ways be a healthy mechanism allowing for creative interpretation and individual decision making, virtues needed by creative artists, not merely mechanistic performers. It proposes that to develop the imaginative and creative potential of their students, teachers need to acknowledge their own artistic practice and heritage, and model through their teaching the behaviours and attitudes of artists.

Situating myself in the research

The questions above have arisen directly from my own practice and experience. With

the realisation that for many of those I teach the class is their main experience of ballet, I have become very aware of my responsibility as teacher both to them and to the form. What are they learning about ballet in my classes, and how am I presenting it? I am also aware that my choreography and teaching influence each other. I draw on my knowledge and understanding as a teacher of ballet classes in making and performing work; and I bring my choreographic concerns, preferences and priorities into what I teach in the studio. How does this two way process work? And does it matter for ballet if the roles of teacher and choreographer, historically closely intertwined, are now more often separated in professional companies?

The desire to research these concerns led me to undertake participant observation of a range of current classes, in order to contextualise more theoretical investigation of ballet's learning, and uncover how classes may unwittingly be affected by external pressures. An ethnological approach of detailed observation can potentially shine light on aspects of the class process which are unspoken and taken for granted, drawing attention to the familiar by treating it as unfamiliar. However, in analysing and reflecting on my findings it has been necessary to recognise my status as a highly involved participant observer rather than an outsider, and openly to acknowledge and counterbalance an autobiographical perspective and bias as part of cultivating reflexivity.

Looking at the research of other practitioners (Claid 2006, Pickard 2008-10) to get a sense of starting points and possible conceptual frameworks, I noted how my memories of formative early experiences of dancing differed from theirs. Before proceeding it therefore seems appropriate to acknowledge my early experiences of ballet, which provided a foundation for my career and have shaped my point of view and areas of interest, and which therefore inform and colour this research.

I started ballet classes at 4 years old, progressing through the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus examinations from Primary upwards at a local ballet school. Arriving at Grade 3 I began additional classes alongside more senior students on the vocational grades (Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced) with Beryl Jackson, a respected senior examiner with a draconian reputation. The school only taught ballet, no modern, jazz or tap; the RAD exams were the be-all and end-all. But in those days as well as ballet technique the syllabus included not just national dances but mime, historical “period deportment”, “theory” tests on French terminology, and the “free dance”, where a piece of music was played, once for you to listen and then for you to do a free dance – the word improvisation was not used – your own invention and combination of steps. Thus the physical learning of ballet’s vocabulary was contextualised by some awareness of its history and origins; and an opportunity was provided for personal interpretation and arrangement of its dance material.

A lack of performance provided in the context of my ballet school (no school shows, no competitions) was counterbalanced by a home life where theatre in the wider sense loomed large, and included visits to performances of dance, straight plays, opera and operetta, as well as participation in school and amateur shows. Thus my early memories of dancing and ballet classes are bound up with the experience of seeing and performing ballet as an ingredient of narrative theatrical performance. My experience within ballet classes of learning national or “character” dances from different countries was also complemented by watching and participating in a local Balkan folk dance circle, reinforcing a sense of ballet’s wider connection with folk and social dance roots.

Once I had outgrown the Princess Tina Ballet Annuals, my father gave me Arnold Haskell’s *Balletomania* and Karsavina’s *Theatre Street*; later I devoured books about the Ballets Russes, including Lydia Sokolova’s entertaining memoir, and Buckle’s biographies of Diaghilev and Nijinsky. I pored over Keith Money’s wonderful

photographs of Margot Fonteyn and his two books about the Royal Ballet, building in my mind some indelible images of what I thought ballet ought to look like. Whatever I may currently think of Haskell's writing, his much-repeated dictum that ballet is an art comprised of a composite of dance, drama, music and design, certainly made sense then and remains powerful for me now, and informs this research. Following from my acceptance of this definition of ballet therefore is a conception of the ballet class as the place in which the classical dance or *danse d'école* that underpins the dance element of Haskell's vision of ballet as a combined theatrical art form is acquired.

Aged 14 I transferred to the ballet school of June Christian, another respected RAD examiner, who began to introduce me to a wider context of ballet study and vocational standards, taking me to London to Cecchetti Society classes on Sundays at Nesta Brooking's school, and inviting Christine Beckley of the Royal Ballet School to teach in Oxford. I also began to attend occasional open classes at the Dance Centre in Covent Garden, fascinated by the non-stop flow and physicality of John O'Brien's classes, and daunted by the precocious technical prowess of students of my age in Anna Northcote's class, giving a timely foretaste of the level and expectations looming at the Royal Ballet Senior School. I joined the school for two years, studying in the classes of Julia Farron and Eileen Ward before beginning my professional career as a member of the corps de ballet of the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden in 1974, later becoming a soloist with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, and ultimately an independent ballet choreographer, and now teacher. Over my years with the companies, as well as resident teachers international guests brought different perspectives and knowledge to the daily class, contributing to my continuing professional development in ballet, in a process both rich and haphazard – absorbed through communal practice rather than consciously studied. This research aims to interrogate this type of learning process and assess its contribution to the ballet dancer's artistic education.

Outline of the research

My first chapter opens out from this personal perspective to paint a broad picture of trends in ballet over the period through which I have lived as a professional ballet practitioner. Serious criticisms and doubts have arisen in recent years as to ballet's training culture, calling into question the class and its effectiveness in preparing ballet's future dancers and dance makers. This overview sets the scene for my own research, lending urgency to the need to deepen understanding of the class as a very particular education in dancing currently being challenged.

Chapter 2 outlines my research methodology and the scope and boundaries of this study. The field research limited itself to classes in the UK for learners of 18 years and up; and the research consciously avoids discussion of issues of gender. I start from the premise that ballet's core principles and vocabulary, and the strategies required to acquire them, are not of their nature gendered; that gender differentiation is brought into the class by the individuals participating, in material consciously selected, and through wider social culture. While drawing on approaches from anthropology and ethnography, in devising an appropriate methodology reference to ethnographic sources has focused on accounts of dance and theatre consciously taught in professional or vocational contexts, rather than on those of the rich field of social dance.

Chapters 3 and 4 build a theoretical picture of the ballet class as embodied learning; how the individual acquires balletic knowledge and skills, and the dispositions of a dancer and potential artist, but also examining the social structures and contexts of the class within which these may develop. Reading has extended to sources from different fields and disciplines, to illuminate by analogy and comparison aspects of ballet's learning which are as yet not much discussed within the field's own scholarship.

Chapter 5 provides an account of a pilot study of a professional class on video in the

public domain. This served to develop a method for documenting observations as well as teasing out some central themes and questions about classes and the way they function; namely the differing aims and purposes that shape classes; the role of the class in providing for the warm-up, body maintenance and fitness of dancers; the relationship of classes to ballet's choreographed repertoire; and considerations of timing in ballet's learning. Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 are discussions of these topics as they manifested in the classes that I observed, in relation to historic examples and current trends. In Chapter 10 I outline my conclusions and some recommendations as to ways in which the class may nurture and encourage the development of dancers as creative interpreters and artists in ballet.

Chapter 1: Critiquing the ballet class

Ballet as an art form has in recent decades become the subject of much questioning and critique both from within and outside the profession; this chapter will look at some of the charges made, and the questions they raise as to the training and development of future generations of artists through participation in the ballet class. Particular issues of concern include allegations of a lack of creativity within the ballet world, and disconnection between ballet's training methods and ideologies and the learning and reproduction of its historic and developing body of repertoire. Ballet's technique and training are critiqued as unnatural and inadequate, and its pedagogy as stiflingly authoritarian, if not actively abusive and damaging to dancers. These concerns lead to consideration of underlying factors; the mutable and contested nature of ballet's knowledge, traditionally transmitted from one generation to the next in practical interaction; the internalisation in ballet dancers through the class of attitudes and self image which may be inimical to their development as autonomous creative artists; and cultural trends as to body image and awareness, which can be seen profoundly to influence ballet's aesthetic and development as a body of artistic knowledge and artefacts.

This chapter will therefore look at the wider ballet milieu in which classes are situated, and the consequent pressures affecting them. The focus of my field research is ballet training within the particular dance culture of the UK; however as ballet is a form with global presence and significant international movement of practitioners, repertoire and academic exchange, this overview of the current “state of the art” will as necessary draw on and be related to thinkers and initiatives beyond UK borders.

1.1 Lack of creativity

In wider discussion of the place of creativity in professional and practical education Albert Danielsson draws attention to the stages in the creative development of an idea; its birth, its development and spread, its penetration into wider society, its regulation, and possibly also its death (Danielson in Göranzon & Florin 1992 p69). At least the first three of Danielsson's stages call for creativity; and for an idea to be successful it requires not only individual inventors but "recipients"; in this wider sense creativity can be seen as not just the isolated work of individual genius but a social phenomenon. A major criticism levelled at ballet as a genre in recent years is that of a lack of creativity, prompting speculation that ballet as an art form may be moving into the final stages of this progression, prior to potential disappearance. Danielsson notes how creativity is often "treated either as relating to an individual or as an event or an occasion" (ibid. p67), but sees time as a crucial component in the development of creative ideas. The cultural milieus which foster creativity are not created but evolve in a historical and cultural context, creativity as process not simply product; a process in ballet in which the training of dancers through the ballet class plays a significant role.

Recent repertoire programming suggests a widespread perception that it is problematic to develop interesting choreography from within the genre. The end of the twentieth century marked the passing of a significant number of major figures in dance (Newman 2004 p126). The death of great choreographers such as Balanchine (in 1983), Tudor (1987), Ashton (1988), MacMillan (1992) and Robbins (1998), generated discussion as to where the next creators in ballet were to come from. Simultaneously in Britain major contemporary companies such as London Contemporary Dance and Rambert Dance consolidated their presence, and a vibrant independent dance sector was emerging, making new and experimental work in a wide range of forms, increasingly including dance of diverse ethnic origins. This could be seen to have contributed to repositioning

ballet in the mind of dancers and public as merely one form among many, museum of a mainly 19th century tradition, rather than source of relevant technical knowledge and home of innovation.

Established ballet companies have tackled the challenge of generating innovative repertoire by drawing contemporary choreographers in to make work, rather than commissioning work from choreographers emerging from ballet's own training and tradition. A salient recent example of this in the UK can be seen in the association of Akram Khan with English National Ballet; following the making of a successful shorter work for the company, the Kathak and contemporary dance artist was commissioned to make a new full length version of the iconic ballet classic *Giselle*, premiered in 2016. In the last two decades the Royal Ballet has not only taken into its repertoire works by such boundary crossing dance-makers as Twyla Tharp, William Forsythe, Nacho Duato, and Mats Ek, but has also commissioned works from contemporary choreographers, some of them with little if any ballet training and experience. These have included Siobhan Davies, Kim Brandstrup, Hofesh Shechter, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and most notably Wayne McGregor, who in 2016 marked 10 years as the company's Resident Choreographer. Conversely, it is worth noting respected independent choreographers who as dancers felt the need to break away from the institutional embrace of the Royal Ballet to develop their visions elsewhere; Michael Clark, Jonathan Burrows and Russell Maliphant. Regular choreographic activities and opportunities to study dance composition have been included within the Royal Ballet School curriculum from the mid 1970s, led in the Upper School by experienced choreographers Norman Morrice, David Drew, Kate Flatt and Jennifer Jackson, and now with the involvement of Wayne McGregor. But despite the emergence of a succession of young dancers interested in making work, with the exception of Christopher Wheeldon, Cathy Marston and Liam Scarlett, few have broken through to establish high-profile choreographic careers within ballet's institutions.

Concern has arisen that on-going training through daily immersion in the ballet technique class plays a part in inhibiting the development of inventive choreographers with the personal embodied knowledge of ballet's concepts, principles and vocabulary of steps that comes from experience as a professional level ballet dancer. In the last two decades dance thinkers and writers have addressed this issue from different perspectives, suggesting a range of different solutions.

As emerging choreographers Jennifer Jackson and I broke away from our Royal Ballet roots in 1988 to make new ballet-based work on a smaller scale for different performance contexts within the independent sector. Later reflecting on our experience for Dance Theatre Journal, we raised the issue of the class's focus on the interpretation of existing dance material; rather than the generation of new, and the empowering of the individual to 'speak' ballet with a personal voice (Crow & Jackson 1999 pp38-39). This concern was simultaneously being given in depth consideration in Helsinki in Paula Salosaari's doctoral dissertation of 2001. This arose from her own concerns as a professional dancer disenchanted with what she and other ballet practitioners identified as feelings of "repetition, alienation, lack of creativity and lack of movement expansion and dance making in ballet class" (Salosaari 2001, p13). As a teacher she became frustrated with the repetitive nature of class, which seemed in conflict with the desire to expand the creative skills of her dancers:

"I became acutely aware that within the classical ballet teaching tradition into which I had grown, expanding vocabularies, improvisation or making individual dance movements was not included."

(Salosaari 2001 p11)

Furthermore she was aware of the difficulty of integrating balletic movement material into improvisation, finding such movement awkward and out of place in a different dance environment. Yet increasingly ballet companies' programming of works in a wider range of styles calls for dancers to be versatile, able to adjust and to use working

methods which involve the individual generation of material, and elements of co-authorship. For Salosaari the ballet class can be a place of conflict between the apparently opposed aims of safeguarding historic traditions and nurturing innovation. Her research aimed “to bridge the gap between technical virtuosity and artistic intentionality in ballet teaching” and to find teaching methods which might prepare the dancer for evolving performance and compositional practices (ibid. p20).

Problematic issues within ballet training culture identified by Salosaari include the conflict between developing dancers as interchangeable performers or as unique and inimitable artists. Arguably ballet requires dancers to be both the versatile actor who can don a mask to perform a different role, and the irreplaceable individual that inspires and informs the making of new choreography. The class must prepare the dancer to master shared technical skills and concepts while developing individual expressive qualities. Salosaari pinpoints the historic tension between “formal” dance content, here referring to its medium, and “narrative” content – anything outside the medium of the dance; making a powerful case for the inherent expressivity of ballet’s vocabulary, and drawing attention to the dangers of the separation in teaching of the notions of technique and expression:

“If the classroom work is emphasizing learning the vocabulary as a basic technique on which the later artistic intention (probably dramatic) is added, the dancer may not become aware of the potential expressiveness in the vocabulary itself. The lack of qualified intentionality in the classroom practice leads to the attitude that formal dance material is to be performed ‘impeccably’ and that the range of choices is narrow.”

(ibid. p31)

In addition to these unresolved conflicts, Salosaari identifies other aspects of ballet class pedagogy which may be inimical to creativity. An emphasis on extrinsic feedback – either from the teacher or from the mirror - may inhibit the development of the dancer’s own intrinsic feedback mechanisms of proprio- and exteroception. She questions the notion of the good teacher as the one who gives a lot of corrections, controlling student learning through expertise. While she recognises the need to teach

ballet's vocabulary as it is traditionally understood to provide "guidelines for correct execution", she warns that excessive teacher feedback does not allow sufficiently "for personal searching through sensory information" (ibid. p33). Salosaari describes ballet's standard teaching mode as the teacher presenting movement which the student then repeats as exactly as possible, followed by teacher feedback; this "command style", as identified by Mosston and Ashworth, may be appropriate if "ballet teaching is seen as transferring the known vocabulary accurately, precisely, and efficiently to the learner" (ibid. p41); but is unlikely to prepare the dancer as artistic interpreter and co-author. For Salosaari ballet teachers need to find a teaching style that allows "autonomy to produce individual solutions" (ibid. p36).

Other dance researchers have subsequently drawn attention to the perceived prevalence of traditional teacher-centred approaches in the teaching of ballet, and questioned the effect of such pedagogy on the development of creativity. Investigating creativity in dance education, David Mead characterises traditional approaches thus:

"Here, the teacher selects the movement and demands attention, absolute imitation, and discipline. The steps, it seems, are supreme..."

(Mead 2012 p2)

Tanja Răman expands on this view of the dance technique teaching process as primarily concerned with the "transmission of information from an expert (dance teacher) to a novice (dance student), through verbal instructions and demonstration." (Răman, 2009 p77). She draws on the analyses of learning styles by educationalists working both within dance and beyond it to critique such an approach as superficial in its focus on "transferring the content of the class", rather than concentrating on the development of the student; and inappropriate for the development of prized higher-order thinking skills of problem-solving and creativity. The teacher's control of the material and its presentation can be seen as denying students opportunities to develop autonomous learning skills of decision-making and evaluation of their own actions and process (ibid. pp77-8).

Such skills are important not only for aspiring dance-makers, but also for developing interpretive discrimination and performers capable of both personal expression and stylistic nuance. In two seminal critiques Geraldine Morris looked at the effects on performance of recent developments in ballet training and the influence of the model of international ballet competitions, which have proliferated since the establishment in 1964 of the annual competition at Varna, Bulgaria. Herself a former dancer like Salosaari, Morris brings the perspective of a historian to contextualise and compare current preoccupations in vocational training. Rather than the development of choreographic aptitudes, Morris' concern here is more specifically focused on the understanding and embodiment of style in relation to the performance requirements of repertoire, arising from her particular interest in and danced experience of the ballets of Frederick Ashton. Her doctoral research brought to light an erosion of stylistic features in performances of Ashton's work, a view supported by other writers and critics (Morris 2003 pp17-18).

This erosion Morris attributes to the priority now given in ballet teaching to “the acquisition of flamboyant skills, and the mechanics of executing the codified technical movements” (ibid. p18). She perceives a contradiction between the emphasis in major British vocational schools on “uniformity, physical fitness and gymnastic competence” and their claim to develop versatile dancers able to perform all types of ballet repertoire. Morris roots this in what she sees as a fundamental inability of the ballet profession and its pedagogues to acknowledge stylistic variation as inherent not just in choreographic works but in different training methods. Much ballet vocational training pursues an ideal of overarching and objective style-free neutrality in training, rather than accepting that even technical exercises may be “open to personal interpretation and subject to changing cultural and aesthetic values” (ibid. p19). Increasingly a perceived “correct” technical execution of steps is seen as the main concern of classes

and training, more important than their potential for variable manifestation as part of choreographed action, and the development of corresponding interpretative or expressive skills. This mechanically oriented approach was manifest in the performances Morris witnessed at the Prix de Lausanne in 2007, where the stylistic and characterful nuances of a range of predominantly nineteenth century ballet solos seemed submerged beneath uniformly high leg extensions and split jumps, in monotonous performances in which “performers lacked a sense of individuality and even identity” (Morris, 2008 p45). In wider dance training provision for independent professional dancers a similar striving for stylistic neutrality permeates many ballet classes aiming to meet the technical needs of a range of genres (for further discussion see Chapter 8).

Morris points to the dearth of writing and discussion within the profession as to artistic as opposed to technical aspects of ballet which “makes it difficult for dancers and teachers to articulate what they mean by style and artistry” (Morris 2008 p45) and to distinguish informed artistic judgements, necessary for the evaluation of choreographed dances, from personal and aesthetic preferences. It might be assumed in the process of course and curriculum design that style can be acquired through separate study of repertoire or in rehearsal; but, referencing Bourdieu, Morris warns of dancers and teachers limited by the unconscious workings of a ballet habitus inculcated in the daily class and unexamined (Morris, 2003 p21).

It appears that a disconnection currently observable at different levels of ballet’s institutions between training and the study of choreography in ballet may also exacerbate what Morris perceives as the ignoring in training of concepts of style. Through teaching and examining systems young dancers can now be taught by teachers without first-hand professional ballet performing experience and embodied knowledge; and who in the class transmit standardised dance material rather than

selecting or inventing their own in response to the needs of particular student groups and contexts. Set syllabi provide few if any opportunities to learn and experience the dances of major choreographers; it is usually not until vocational training that the opportunity to study repertoire arises. Contrast with novice musicians, who almost from the start of their learning may be exposed to the melodies and compositions of composers such as Bach, Bartok and Mozart. Adult learners without aspiring to a dance career potentially contribute to the wider ballet community as an informed and engaged audience; yet they have had little opportunity in their practical engagement with the form through classes to explore elements of ballet's canon of works and historic repertoire. At professional level, no doubt in part an inevitable consequence of the growth and establishment of ballet institutions, increasing specialisation of company roles has engendered a separation between choreography and teaching, and between the responsibilities of class teacher and coach/repetiteur, with class teachers who may have little familiarity with company repertoire, and choreographers who never teach class. These developments raise new and urgent questions as to the contribution of the ballet technique class to the wider artistic education of ballet's learners at all levels.

Thus a range of factors would appear currently to undermine the development through their training of ballet dancers as creative artists. Salosaari's concerns as to the prioritising in ballet class of the reproduction of existing technical content rather than the encouragement of creative and exploratory behaviours to enable new choreography, are reinforced by Morris's critique of the profession's lack of questioning and awareness of pervasive and homogenous stylistic inflections in both ballet training and performance. A prevalent command pedagogic style, while arguably efficient in transmitting physical skills, does not encourage the abilities of evaluation and imagination necessary for artistic making. The increasing circumstantial disconnect between ballet's technical training and the artistic knowledge embodied in its repertoire

potentially deprives learners at all levels of understanding of the historic and cultural frameworks within which their dancing is situated. In the grand scheme of the development of ballet as an art form, its study today through class can be seen to be framed too narrowly as physical training for executants; rather than as a broader education.

1.2 Unnatural and limiting

Although competency in ballet's technical skills remains a crucial requirement in the overall training of young dancers aiming for careers in a range of dance performance genres, its inclusion within wider dance training has not been without criticism. A history of suspicion and dislike of ballet's aesthetic and ethos can be traced back to Isadora Duncan's trenchant criticisms, through outright rejection of its virtuosity by minimalists such as Yvonne Rainer in the 1960s. While still acknowledged for contributing to dancers' skills and strength, the ballet class continues to be questioned as a way of preparing dancers capable of meeting the needs of new repertoire and modern dance aesthetics.

2012 brought concerns about ballet's training to a head, at the conference *Ballet, Why and How?* which assembled a range of voices from dance and related disciplines in Stockholm; the proceedings were published in 2014. If Morris finds current training does not adequately prepare ballet dancers to dance past repertoire, some contributors here also clearly found it lacking as a basis for performance of current and future choreography. In her introduction to the proceedings, dancer Gaby Allard recounted her personal experience that classical ballet training did not prepare her for dancing Cunningham repertoire, and movingly described her sense of alienation and unfamiliarity in the process of her transition to a contemporary dance company:

“I lost my balance, literally and figuratively, and could no longer fall back on the system of learning I had acquired through the classical technique and training I had enjoyed.”

(Allard in Brown & Vos eds. 2014 p19)

Dance anthropologist Anna Aalten's presentation 'Ballet in Transition: Why Classical Ballet Technique is No Longer Sacrosanct', drawing on years of research into the professional dance world of the Netherlands, fired a broadside at classical ballet technique. In the teachers and directors of vocational schools she interviewed Aalten found a widely shared view that classical technique should be the foundation of dance training programmes, given its perceived virtues of “clarity of movement, beautiful lines, the way it teaches dancers how to control their bodies, and the development of strength” (teacher quoted by Aalten 2014 p48). But she challenges this:

“In theory, classical ballet technique might be a neutral dance technique, but in practice it carries the weight of a long tradition of specific aesthetic ideals that are not easily discarded... Despite its richness and systematic nature, a daily ballet class is not enough to train today's dancers, who must be at home in many different styles.”

(Aalten 2014 pp50-51)

Her specific criticisms include finding the pacing of exercises insufficiently aerobic, that arms and core muscles do not receive sufficient attention for the needs of more contemporary work; and she flags up dangers of overtraining and the creation of counterproductive movement patterns which can lead to injury. For her ballet is completely unnatural, with its embodied ideals of “turnout, stylisation and verticality”. Like Morris she finds the preferential status given in training to what is perceived as the traditional ballet class and its aesthetic ideology at odds with the need for today's dancers to be versatile and conversant with a range of dance techniques. Elsewhere she stresses the significance of acquiring the exacting technique that is the basis of ballet practice:

“Academic dance, or ballet as it is usually called, is based on a meticulously described technique that puts specific demands on dancers... With the technique, dancers are given a whole body of ideas and opinions about aesthetics, which they will, literally, embody.”

(Aalten 2004 p267)

From a detailed description of one particular class she builds an absolute picture of ballet's overriding characteristics, aesthetics and ideology; yet there many different interpretations of what ballet's expertise consists of. Research into the ballet class and evaluation of its efficacy calls for a historical dimension and awareness, to situate teaching practices not only geographically but within the context of varied and evolving artistic and teaching traditions. As Chris Challis reminds us:

“... ballet is not a single system of training but many; there are similarities between systems, but each is codified in particular ways, and the rules for the arrangement of units or meaningful phrases of action depends on the system in question.”

(Challis 1999, p145)

Comprehensive systems and set curricula such as those promoted by the Royal Academy of Dance and the Vaganova School have imposed their own standardisations of knowledge by which ballet's learners may be assessed. Morris in her discussion of the identification of style in dance has taken issue with such standardised teaching (Morris, 2012), arguing that the international dominance of Soviet training methods based on the work of the great pedagogue Agrippina Vaganova has led to a homogeneity in the *danse d'école*, observable in the dancing of young contestants at international ballet competitions such as the Prix de Lausanne. Soviet training methods have been adopted in Japan, China, and Korea; the Vaganova system is widely used in USA, and was introduced to the Royal Ballet School in the 1980s under Merle Park's directorship. Morris finds the absolutism of this particular training problematic; in particular the separation in the teaching of steps into discrete units which can only be performed in one correct way (Morris 2012, pp4-8).

Institutionalised pedagogic systems also potentially diminish the role of the teacher by removing individual creative agency, limiting the autonomy and responsibility of teachers operating within these systems to model alternative technical conceptions and variants, and provide these as options for learners to explore. In 1961 Erik Bruhn and

Lilian Moore sounded a warning note about such drawbacks, with reference to the effects of the systematization of the Danish choreographer August Bournonville's teaching after his death into six classes for the different days of the week. Despite its valuable preservation of aspects of ballet technique, enabling generations of dancers to master the requirements of the Bournonville repertoire,

“...it had the harmful effect of making it possible for anyone who had memorized the order of the classes to teach the 'Bournonville system'. Any exercise is good only in the hands of one who knows how and when to use it... Any teaching method which becomes arbitrary and dogmatic will inevitably degenerate, because it can be taught by rote.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005, pp23-4)

1.3 Abusive teaching and damaging practice

In *Ballet Why and How?* not only was ballet's technical knowledge under fire but also the manner of its delivery in classes and rehearsals. Robin Lakes has looked to ballet's origins to ask what might be learned about the origin and nature of authoritarian and even abusive teaching methods widely seen to be still prevalent in ballet classes and rehearsals, the subject of much anecdotal report. Her depiction of dancing masters founded in study of treatises and technical manuals from the Early Modern period (1400-1750) sheds light on the multiple roles of these individuals, who not only taught dances of the time and choreographed a range of spectacles, but also acted as arbiters of etiquette and social morality, often involved in military training through the teaching of drills and the use of weaponry (Lakes 2014, p27).

Lakes highlights the links between militarism and dance in the education of the aristocratic classes, and dance's consequent categorisation as a “noble art” in Gottfried Taubert's *The Compleat Dancing Master* of 1717. She describes the development of a culture of insulting and disdainful behaviour towards students whose behaviour and dancing were judged as not living up to high class standards, as dancing masters'

teaching activities and employment spread out to encompass the education of members of a burgeoning middle class. She sees the “elitist and vicious pedagogical mode” of dancing masters as an example of what social anthropologist Paul Spencer called “the generation of anxiety as an educational technique” (Spencer cited in Lakes 2014 p29); and she asked her audience to consider whether vestiges of this school of harsh judgement, class and social bias, and militarism still haunt ballet teaching.

Writing of his own experience, as both student and teacher, of authoritarianism in the dance studio, Clyde Smith provides useful clarification of the spectrum of meanings around the words “authority” and “authoritarian” (Smith C. 1998 p125). Those with authority are experts or in a position of power; although Smith qualifies this by suggesting that authority figures, while in positions of power, are not necessarily experts. For him “authoritarianism and authoritarian behaviour entail enforced submission to an authority figure...” (ibid. p125). The crucial difference between the authoritative dance teacher and the authoritarian lies in the recognition of the ultimate autonomy of the individual and respecting of personal boundaries, without which authoritarian teaching shades into abuse. Smith defines abusive behaviour as “verbal or physical acts that express disrespect or contempt and cause injury or damage” (ibid. p125). While recreational dancers always have the option to withdraw from a class where they are ill treated, aspirant vocational students and professionals may have little choice as to whose class they attend.

Recent writings about dance show that abusive teaching behaviour can take many forms, from the physical (actual violence or insisting on excessive or damaging physical practice) to the psychological and emotional (cruel and humiliating treatment, negative comments or neglect, undermining of confidence and identity) via extreme discipline and control. In a paper from 2005 Lakes outlined a legacy of authoritarian dance teaching strategies and attitudes. Her litany detailed often shocking examples

of cruel and abusive teaching practice by “artist-educators” in recent history with accounts from interviews, biographies and oral history sources, the perpetrators working in both ballet and contemporary dance. Although the examples she quoted were almost entirely drawn from dance practice witnessed in the US, the roll-call included artists from Britain, Europe and Russia. The examples included psychological attacks such as insulting dancers and humiliating them in front of their colleagues (Antony Tudor and Jerome Robbins); physical abuse (Anna Sokolow throwing a chair at dancers, Martha Graham slapping and scratching dancers to get a result); bullying and testing dancers to emotional breaking point (Paul Taylor); and incidences of the undermining of dancers' confidence and autonomous action through the withholding of information and feedback (Lakes 2005 pp5-7).

According to Lakes, the dance community's response has been mainly one of acceptance of such behaviour as an inevitable part of “artistic temperament”, and even justification for it in the cause of getting good results, either choreographically or in terms of trained dancers: “The only real basis for judging a teacher is the product he or she turns out: good dancers.” (Melissa Hayden 1981, cited in Lakes 2005 p8).

Dancers have been advised to leave teachers whose manner they cannot withstand and study elsewhere, and Lakes lists a number of “survival guides” which offered advice to dancers on coping mechanisms such as behaviour modification. As Lakes bleakly puts it: “The message is that student behaviour, not pedagogical practice, will have to yield to change in this unreformable world.” (ibid. p8).

Inspired “to expose and investigate the roots of this disturbing pedagogical heritage and the ideologies that underpin it” (Lakes 2005 p4) Lakes looks for possible causes in widely accepted cultural metaphors and traditional approaches to teaching. One metaphor familiar to ballet students that she traces back to the 17th century is that of the student as an empty vessel to be filled with “a predetermined body of knowledge”

(ibid. p9). Other metaphors for the dancer's body include likening the dancer to an animal or a machine; and indeed recent television advertisements have overtly drawn visual comparison between the horse in Olympic dressage (Rio Olympics 2016) and a ballet dancer, and ballerina Tamara Rojo with a luxury car (Lexus 2013). The dancer can also be seen as a lump of clay to be fashioned by the artist, or a computer fed with data. For Lakes,

“all these metaphors diminish the totality and complexity of the human learner, whose learning process results from the interplay of affective, cognitive, social and sensory/kinesthetic stimuli.”

(Lakes 2005 p10)

Autobiographical accounts of dancers who worked with George Balanchine document a supremely influential example of questionable teaching practices, that were generally accepted by the ballet community out of respect for his almost divine status as genius choreographer and founder director of New York City Ballet. Despite his prolific choreographic activity Balanchine chose to continue to teach class, using it as a laboratory to develop the movement qualities and physical aesthetic he was interested in, dictating preferred ways of executing certain technical elements which other teachers followed (for a detailed account of his preferred way of jumping and the development of a distinctive way of executing the *pas de chat* see Brady 1982 pp149-151).

In her candid autobiography *Dancing on my Grave* American ballerina Gelsey Kirkland documented her conflicts as a young dancer with Balanchine, and was openly critical of his teaching approach. Kirkland's account provides evidence for some of the depersonalising images that Lakes identifies, for example:

“Balanchine's conception of the human form was essentially mechanical. The body was a machine to be “assembled” - the same word that he used to describe the process by which he created his ballets. There were critics who complained that his dancers tended towards uniformity. A robotic quality was supposed to have derived in part from his attempt to forge a neutral vessel as the carrier of his choreographic ideas.”

In teaching class he seems to have been prepared to sacrifice the development of sound physical and technical practice to stylistic experimentation and aesthetic preferences. Kirkland describes him arriving late to teach and not spending sufficient time to warm up dancers, corroborated by Joseph Mazo in his account of a year spent observing and following New York City Ballet (Mazo 1974 p24); in Mazo's vivid description of daily class the dancers warm up in advance and start the class without him. Balanchine insisted that pointe shoes should be worn throughout class, and would accelerate the pace of the combinations of steps (Kirkland 1987 p51) with little regard for potentially injurious effects:

“The speed and shortcuts that he built into the training process called for physical cheating in which the dancer distorted the body to deliver the position or step that Balanchine demanded. The risk of injury was ignored... It was said that Balanchine cherished the aberration of line induced by bunions, that they contributed to the impression of winged feet.”

(Kirkland 1987 pp34-5)

In 1971 Kirkland rebelled and stopped attending Balanchine's classes, spending the next two years studying intensively with Maggie Black to reconstruct her technique and rehabilitate herself from chronic tendonitis. For this defection she claims that Balanchine never forgave her, and “punished” her.

Kirkland's picture of the specific technical distortions of the Balanchine style as cultivated in classes, and the self-disparagement of ambitious young dancers doing anything required to please the master, are corroborated by Joan Brady in her autobiography *The Unmaking of a Dancer: An Unconventional Life*, which traces her training as a dancer first with the San Francisco Ballet School and subsequently the School of American Ballet in New York.

“While Balanchine did not often teach, his presence pervaded the school. There was no aspect of our lives that we did not revise in the light of what we took to be his views. As I've said, we wore heavy make-up because Doubrovskaya said he liked pretty girls, and we made ourselves foolish because several periodicals had quoted him as saying dancers were stupid. Beyond

these, we questioned nothing because he told us not to analyze [sic] when he taught us; we knew hardly anything about each other's lives because he was interested in us as dancers, not as people, where his interest in us left off, ours in each other did too... Such slavishness was as demeaning outside the classroom as it was, perhaps, inevitable; inside the classroom, however, it was both a necessity and a privilege.”

(Brady 1982, pp148-9)

Kirkland's sensational narrative also lays the charge for the damaging late 20th century trend towards extreme thinness in ballet dancers at Balanchine's door, as ballet companies and schools throughout America, often led by those he had trained, adopted the skeletal aesthetic:

“With his knuckles, he thumped on my sternum and down my rib cage, clucking his tongue and remarking, “Must see the bones”... He did not merely say “Eat less.” He said repeatedly, “Eat nothing.” “

(Kirkland 1987 p 56)

A free-thinking dancer who questioned the pervasive Balanchine formalist aesthetic, Kirkland was vilified for her criticisms of the revered choreographer when her book first appeared. A different picture is conjured up by the narratives of dancers who admired and remained loyal to his particular vision of ballet; Balanchine emerges as a charismatic and benevolent paternal figure, fount of balletic wisdom and generator of beauty. Toni Bentley in her memoir *Winter Season: A Dancer's Journal* recounts how, despite personal doubts and dissatisfactions with her life as a member of New York City Ballet, she was seduced by the magic and glamour of this elite group of dancers dancing Balanchine's repertoire (Bentley 1982).

If Balanchine was not overtly violent or abusive he appears to have undermined his dancers' agency in more insidious ways. Dancers were subordinate to his choreographic requirements; he seems to have had scant regard for their health and wellbeing; and while encouraging hard work, he seemingly discouraged questioning, critical thinking or development of independent personal approaches to dancing which might be in conflict with his vision. Philosopher Graham McFee argues that the dancer is not a creative artist but rather an interpreter and executant of another artist's

(the choreographer's) creation (McFee 2011); and the New York City Ballet company culture seems to have fostered such an instrumental view of its performers. The company's attitudes and practices would appear to have been little resisted. Bentley's acceptance of the conditions of belonging and the role of dancers as subservient to creators suggests an internalised sense of this division between performers and creative artists; her choice of metaphors provides a powerful example of some of the defining images that Lakes catalogued:

“Dancers have a direct connection to the heavens and the gods – Balanchine and Stravinsky receive their talents from God, and we as their instruments interpret those visions for mortal men. We are their servants. We are creative in the same way that the paint in the pot is creative... Alone we are incapable and stationary... We must be like trained animals and active instruments, responding to the learned stimulus of music.”

(Bentley 1982 pp141-2)

Arguably only the brave and foolhardy would commit professional suicide by rebelling against a dance establishment so entrenched and admired, the dream destination of so many young dancers. Lakes' account would suggest that tyrannical teaching behaviours and belittling attitudes were in any case widespread. Brady soon left ballet altogether; the talented and committed Kirkland luckily found alternative opportunities more congenial to her desire for expressivity and dramatic interpretation by moving to American Ballet Theatre to partner the recently defected Baryshnikov. After a brief leave of absence Bentley returned to New York City Ballet with renewed zeal and commitment.

Extensive documentation makes it possible to build up a picture of Balanchine's formative influence. His long involvement in teaching ballet class as preparation for his choreographic creation provides an example of how class practice may be implicated not only in the formation of a distinctive style, but also in the construction of a particular sense of dancerly identity, here as performer rather than creative artist. As dancers who had worked with Balanchine progressively spread out through America, setting up

and directing companies, teaching the next generation, and mounting Balanchine repertoire for companies worldwide, so the Balanchine aesthetic and culture was disseminated. Recent scandals, about the behaviour of Peter Martins who succeeded Balanchine as ballet master of NYCB, and very recently some male principal dancers within the company, suggest that elements of denigratory attitudes towards dancers, and in particular female dancers, persist (Kaufman 2018).

It is perhaps harder to trace corresponding attitudes and evidence of damaging teaching practices in Europe, Britain and elsewhere, with fewer candid dancer autobiographies providing an anecdotal peephole into the private world of the ballet studio. Barbara Newman's interviews, most recently with noted dancers who have moved into teaching and coaching, provide vivid and specific glimpses into studio culture. Her wide choice of international ballet personalities perhaps redresses the balance away from negative accounts of experience and practice, but still provides some sharp anecdotes about legendary artists, including some from within the Royal Ballet companies (Newman 2014).

Some of the contributions to *Ballet, Why and How?*'s forum for discussion of ballet teaching, drew together threads of investigation that still evoke a picture of brutal discipline and a "pedagogy devoted to drill and skill" (Warburton cited in Hecht 2014 p93). Thom Hecht in his call for more emotional intelligence in vocational ballet training quotes and endorses Hamilton's damning picture of dance training:

"Serious dance training continues to be based on a military model in which teachers – for better or for worse – exercise considerable authority. Under these circumstances, few dancers question their treatment, even though 50 per cent say they've been unjustly criticised or humiliated in class, and 24 per cent have had a teacher who expected them to work with a serious physical problem."

(Hamilton 1998 cited in Hecht 2014 p92)

The last disturbing claim here draws attention to a widely acknowledged and accepted culture of dancing despite physical pain and injury. Evidence of this can be found in

Anna Aalten's extensive research in the Netherlands and her interviews with dancers about their experiences of pain and the culture of enduring it. Dancer Nienke Bonnema's recollections suggest that this was inculcated as part of training:

“At school you were never allowed to show if something hurt. There was this little note in the dressing room saying “Blood is good, no pain no gain.” That really said it all. Crying if you were in pain was absolutely forbidden. When you did, the reaction was always: “keep smiling! You are the one who wants to be here, if you don't like it you can leave. If you want to stay, stop whining!” So you simply did not dare to stop, you just went on.”

(Nienke Bonnema, cited in Aalten 2005 p64)

More recently in the UK Angela Pickard has written extensively about the experience of pain for young vocational ballet students. She describes a more caring teaching environment with teachers concerned for student's health and well-being; but even so with mixed messages as to pain. Students learn to distinguish between “good pain” as evidence of exertion, and “bad pain” signalling injury and damage; and there may be encouragement to extend the pain threshold in pursuit of bodily and technical perfection:

“ You are constantly fighting with your body, don't let the pain win as your body can always do more. It's nice because if you do fight it, it's so worthwhile.”

(Teacher cited in Pickard 2015 p86)

Wider concern for the health of dancers was generated by the publication in 1996 of the seminal report *Fit to Dance?*, leading to the establishment of Dance UK's nationwide Healthier Dancer Programme. Links with sports science have furthered academic research into dance practice and pedagogy from physiological and psychological perspectives. Julia Buckroyd's book *The Student Dancer* (Buckroyd 2000) drew attention to the psychological impact of vocational training on young dancers, questioning traditional methods and raising concerns. Vocational schools and conservatoires in receipt of UK public funding, and thus subject to public inspection by Ofsted, now take the physical and emotional welfare and safeguarding of their students very seriously. With increasing awareness it would appear that abusive and damaging ballet teaching practices are gradually being eradicated.

But even in the absence of overtly abusive behaviour, Lakes' question as to whether teaching approaches are still shaped by underlying authoritarian attitudes remains open. Clyde Smith reminds us that even the most committed and caring teacher can easily cross the line between authoritative and authoritarian, in a studio situation where dancers are dependent on the teacher for knowledge and feedback, desirous to learn and eager to please (Smith C. 1998 p128). Jennifer Jackson and I later remarked “a propensity for rigidity and fascism” (in the sense of authoritarian, and intolerant of divergence) in elite ballet training, feeding on the “obsessive tendency” that makes highly committed dance students vulnerable to excessive self-imposed discipline (Crow & Jackson 2007 p11). Despite progressive changes emanating from wider educational culture, claims about unacceptable teaching practices in ballet persist.

1.4 Silent and docile bodies

Clyde Smith grounds his own experience and observation of authoritarian teaching practices in theory extrapolated from Michel Foucault's examination of discipline in prisons, the military and schools, in his work of 1979 *Discipline and Punish*. Key to understanding how the continuous exercise of power in the dance studio may create the disciplined dancer or “docile body” are techniques of surveillance, especially the cultivation of self-surveillance:

“... an atmosphere of constant surveillance must be created by the observer, so that the observed always feels watched. This feeling in turn creates a situation in which the observed ultimately maintains a state of self-surveillance whether or not the surveilling power is actually present. The dance classroom with its mirrors, watchful teachers, and self-critical students, is a key site for both the external and internal surveillance of dancing bodies...”

(Smith C. 1998 p131)

Jill Green used a Foucauldian analysis to examine conservatoire-style pedagogy in the

dance studios in higher education in America, in a research study which looked at the body image perceptions of college dance students. Despite increasing awareness and condemnation of abusive coercion by dance teachers Green nevertheless identified the development of less overt ways of ensuring continuing student compliance and “docile bodies” through the technique class (Green 2002-3). In their desire to become Balanchine's “chosen creatures” (Brady 1982 p149) the young Kirkland and Brady could be seen as earlier examples of this transfer of control to self surveillance and imposition of normative behaviour; as Clyde Smith puts it, “participat[ing] in their own oppression” (Smith C. 1998 p124). While internalising such discipline may have benefits in terms of producing dancers who conform to required technical and presentational standards, Green questions its effect on the developing artist:

“This shift towards surveillance, and particularly self-surveillance, has been effective in training docile dance performers, but not so effective in producing dance artists who take ownership of their bodies and artistic processes. As Quinby (1991) suggests, perhaps impeding the creative energies that could subvert the dominant paradigm is just the point. By producing docile bodies in dance classes, there is less likelihood of ending up with political artists who question norms of ideology as well as practice.”

(Green 2002-3 pp100-1)

Hecht also draws attention to a traditional expectation of silence on the part of dance students, quoting Australian dancer and teacher Dale Johnston, writing about the practices he observed while researching Australian ballet schools:

“Discussion between teacher and student, or amongst students, is actively discouraged. Within this style of teaching, students are expected to be seen and not heard; not to speak unless spoken to. Students should think but dare not speak, lest they be seen as troublesome or disruptive.”

(Johnston 2006 p3)

Echoing Salosaari's work on encouraging student creative autonomy and proactive engagement, Gretchen Alterowitz has shifted her ballet teaching practice to ensure that students have a voice. Seeing ballet's aesthetic as rooted in dualistic and patriarchal Western philosophies, she makes a case from a feminist perspective for adopting “a

more democratic pedagogy” to replace the traditional authoritarian relationship of teacher to student:

“Challenging traditional ballet teaching is necessary if instructors and choreographers desire ballet to evolve into an art form that addresses contemporary concerns.”

(Alterowitz 2014 p9)

As an enthusiastic practitioner of ballet herself, loving its beauty, clarity and aspiration to perfection, Alterowitz nevertheless became uncomfortably aware of the way the technique normalizes dancers through “acute body awareness and self surveillance” (ibid. p9). As does Lakes, she roots not only ballet's dance vocabulary but its courtly ideology of grace, uprightness and obedience in its aristocratic origins. The hierarchical structure and development of the class, and its reliance on learning by mimicry and repetition are seen as problematic, with the potential to stifle individual thinking and creative exploration. But on the positive side Alterowitz notes ballet's rigour and precision, its encouragement of consistent commitment, its capacity to promote resilience and self-discipline, and to build community alongside individuality and competition. For her the key to conveying and shifting the technique's core values lies in the way that teachers may engage and relate to students.

Student-centred teaching strategies that Alterowitz explored in her ballet technique classes for a BA programme in dance included involving students in discussion around the aesthetics and values underlying particular dance tasks, as well as in collaborative working and peer feedback. She provided opportunities for the design and pursuit of individual research goals and processes, and space for students to voice their questions and comments. In allowing time for more “conceptual exploration” Alterowitz was aware of the pressure to cover required movement material, but concluded that students' deeper engagement and learning more than compensated for any reduction in class content. A confidential survey revealed that overall her students responded positively to and benefited from this different approach; reinforcing Becky Dyer's

contention that more democratic teaching methods do not necessarily impede the development of specific technical proficiency (Dyer 2009 p121). This led Alterowitz to deduce that “greater comprehension comes from learning with both mind and body, and students' verbalization of concepts or questions adds to the information's depth.” (Alterowitz 2014 p13).

One dissenting student's less positive response to Alterowitz' survey nevertheless provided a powerful spur to reflection. The student's view exemplified a more traditional expectation as to the relationship between dominant instructor and pupil, the inappropriateness of personal experience to technical instruction, and the desire for less time to be spent in “chat” and more in rigorous bodily activity (ibid. p13). A reminder of the challenge that shifting the paradigm of authoritarian ballet teaching might potentially face, in terms of breaking from norms of harsh and inhibiting behaviour which may nevertheless be accepted by students as well as teachers. This raises a legitimate concern as to the appropriateness and effectiveness of a more intellectual and theoretical teaching mode in the context of the transmission of embodied skills and understandings.

1.5 Athletic bodies

Jill Green's students revealed the pressures they felt to conform to a particular body shape (Green 2002-3). An extremely thin ideal female body had emerged from the Balanchine tradition, but has also been internationally visible on fashion catwalks, requiring dysfunctional eating behaviours to achieve it. Extreme examples which brought the issue of the slender body image required of female ballet dancers to wider public attention included the death of Heidi Guenther of the Boston Ballet in 1997, following an eating disorder brought on by trying to lose weight (Oliver, 2005). Drawing on the thinking of feminist scholar Susan Bordo in her analysis, Oliver saw causes not

only in practical considerations - the desirability of lightness of body for partnering, pointe work, and as a major distinguishing feature of ballet's dance aesthetic – but also in the expectations of artistic directors and audiences, shaped by restrictive beauty standards for women in wider society.

In recent years the preferred ballet body aesthetic has moved towards favouring more muscular (albeit still slim) bodies, the dancer as athlete. Production photographs and advertisements in dance magazines testify to current fashion in both theatre design and professional practice dress for bare legs, the better to reveal a ripped musculature (for representative examples see Northern Ballet School's advertisement on page 45 and the photograph accompanying the review of the Royal Ballet's Wayne McGregor triple bill on page 64 of *The Dancing Times* for December 2016). Writing in 2007 for *The Dancing Times*' opinion piece *Talking Point*, Jennifer Jackson and I noted the change of core aesthetic, but our welcome was qualified:

“...has the dance profession grown up or merely swapped one unhealthy obsession for another? Could the pursuit of first thinness and now strength be seen not merely as the quest for a particular ideal but a symptom of a narrow and obsessive mind-set focused on the physical body?”

(Crow & Jackson 2007 p11)

Our concern lay in what we saw as an imbalance in training approach towards greater emphasis on athletic virtuosity in balletic performance. This was driven by interest in and adoption of the findings of research from sports science, on one level beneficially furthering the ballet community's knowledge of the physiology and psychology of the dancer, in order to maximise athletic performance and prevent injury. But advancement of knowledge on scientific fronts has remained unaccompanied by artistically focused enquiry, which might develop the intellectual and emotional capacities and understanding of the dancer. We proposed that a prevailing conception of the dancer as a goal-driven athlete engaged in “display or competition” shifted the focus on stage to the communication of physical skill and virtuosity, rather than “artistic communication and meaning”; distancing the public from immersion in an artistic

experience, while drawing the attention to admire the dancer as body rather than person.

We saw focus on the body and measurable outcomes as in tune with a pervasive technical rationality in modern society. Unbeknown to us at the time, such concerns were also being voiced by experts in other areas of physical education. In a powerful polemic John Evans had lamented the disappearance from discussion of physical education in schools and teacher training of philosophical debate of the concepts of education and ability. Evans contended that an instrumentalist political agenda, influenced by powerful lobbies from health and organized sport, had narrowed conceptions of physical ability, with “emphasis placed on body improvement and perfection” (Evans 2004 p101). This privileges a narrow band of pupils from compatible social classes and home cultures, rather than providing a wider range and greater depth of physical educational experience that could be accessible to a more diverse community.

In his case studies of a range of embodied techniques Ben Spatz draws attention to a globalized discourse or ideology of “healthism” increasingly informing Euro-American culture and society:

“Whereas previous generations understood health variously in relation to ethics, morality, or hygiene, the healthist ideal has more to do with athleticism and the visible shape of bodies.”

(Spatz 2015 p83)

This tendency has been analysed in depth in Brian Pronger's *Body Fascism* (Pronger 2002). Pronger contends that in a society dominated by modern technology, humans are reconfigured as expendable economic resources. Rather than cultivating imaginative freedom, formal education is increasingly geared to the training “of young people as good resources for the economic system” (Pronger 2002 p65). In discourse dominated by scientific perspectives the body is seen as “an individual biological object”

(ibid. p66). In his examination of the “technology of physical fitness” Pronger points to a growing body of research in three disciplinary categories; exercise physiology, biomechanics, and the psychology of exercise and sport (ibid. p130). But although such research is often multi-disciplinary within the field of the sciences, Pronger has found little place for consideration of critical findings and cultural perspectives from sociology, anthropology or history within these investigations. A partial, science-led perspective is further propagated in a commercialised world through popular texts and physical fitness products and services, which play on public health and body image anxieties.

Such perspectives could be seen to have powerfully infiltrated balletic thinking, with practitioners at all levels largely disconnected from its artistic heritage. Ballet as technical knowledge and as manifest in recent choreographies, notably ballets by Wayne MacGregor, is increasingly influenced by scientific texts and a technological agenda. The Royal Ballet now boasts a team of 19 Healthcare and Fitness Staff; suggesting that the ballet class is no longer regarded as adequate maintenance for today's professional ballet dancer. There is money and power behind scientific research, but far less for humanities or arts-led research which might provide an alternative view on the nature and purpose of balletic practice. What exists recorded in texts is measurable and provides evidence acceptable to government, funders, and “the hegemony of the intellectual cognitive domain of propositional knowledge” (Nutt & Clark 2002 p155). The ballet community's current overriding concern with physical fitness leaves little room for exploration of artistic expression in the ballet class.

1.6 Moving forwards

This chapter has situated the ballet class in a current cultural context, surveying recent criticisms of the class, as a training method and educational phenomenon, and for its

role in shaping the attitudes of dancers within ballet's own world. Addressing a perceived lack of relevance and creativity in new ballet choreography, companies have adopted a strategy of commissioning choreographers from outside the genre to make new work. Widespread critiques have documented limited and questionable pedagogic practice in ballet's technique class, and argue powerfully that it clings to outmoded traditions rooted in its historic origins, inhibiting the development of autonomous practitioners and artistry through abusive practices and a culture of critical self-surveillance.

The class evolved as a training to facilitate the creative acts of dancers and dance makers. But it has become increasingly separated from the distinct stylistic needs of ballet's historic repertoire, in danger of losing its direct connection to a tradition of artistic creation within the form. Moreover, recent concentration in ballet classes on the physical aspects of technical development, as seen from a scientific perspective and in line with a wider cultural focus on the body, has drawn attention away from prioritising the development of the dancer and dancing, to the increasingly prevalent conceptualisation of the dancer as athlete rather than artist. A perception has grown that the class is no longer adequate physical preparation for the acrobatic requirements of modern choreographies. Thus both the artistic and technical functioning of the class are now called into question.

This overview of recent history nevertheless begins to show how practice and pedagogy evolve over time; susceptible to the stylistic influences not only of major creative figures such as Balanchine, but also of wider cultural trends. In addition to the increasing influence of scientific thinking these currently include changing pedagogic thinking arising from concerns as to authoritarian and abusive practices. The technique class cannot therefore be regarded as an absolute and immutable form, but one which reflects the requirements and attitudes of its time and circumstance, and

which is capable of change.

Practitioner teachers like Salosaari and Alterowitz have already experimented with alterations to ballet training's teaching strategies (Salosaari's engagement of students in creative tasks) and delivery (Alterowitz' democratic and student-centred approaches). David Mead documents changing pedagogic practices to build "creative behaviours" alongside technique at the Cloud Gate Dance School in Taipei (Mead 2013). Psychologists such as Julia Buckroyd have brought greater understanding to the mental and emotional development of young dancers in their formative years (Buckroyd 2000). Yet there has still to be close examination of how the persisting structure of the class functions as an education in dancing, and how ballet's body of shared technical knowledge and movement vocabulary is transmitted and reconstructed afresh by new generations of dancers. This requires detailed examination and analysis of the specific interaction of the constituent elements of the class, as it happens in relation to varying purposes and contexts.

This research thus surveys a range of current ballet practice in Britain, to elucidate the aims and intentions of both teachers and learners, and reveal how differing circumstances and approaches may shape class content and delivery; the aim to identify in particular factors that may favour or inhibit the development of creative agency in dancers. The next chapter will consider the implications of documenting and analysing ballet classes, laying out the design of a methodology for researching and shedding light on these questions.

Chapter 2: Rationale and Methodology

2.1 A qualitative research project

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes [sic] words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.”
(Cresswell 1998 p15)

Field research into the ballet class calls for a qualitative methodology. A starting point for this research was a realisation that ballet training needs to be investigated as an oral and embodied culture, often happening in contexts where learning is informal and unregulated, with small groups of learners, and with a range of educational agendas; not lending itself to statistical comparison. Dancing, like playing a musical instrument, painting or practical craft skills, is not acquired by reading or talking about it, or sitting in a classroom, but by physically imitating, doing and experiencing. To understand the embodied experience and processes of learning in the ballet class requires observing and documenting it as a happening in a natural setting. This is additionally coloured by the personal experiences, circumstances and perspectives of learners and teachers, which may not always be immediately outwardly manifest in their observed practice, or in discretely measurable and comparable outcomes. The ballet class as a phenomenon is thus complex, variable and contested, requiring detailed description and analysis of distinct examples to identify what aspects of it are shared and widely accepted, and what may be open to variation and adaptation.

For this investigation I have undertaken primary research into current practice through a series of case studies exemplifying the class in different contexts, including observations and interviews with teachers and class participants. This chapter outlines the scope and limitations of this research project; it considers the range of literature

consulted about the practice of ballet training before going on to outline the research strategy. It notes the implications for field research of particular circumstances in the terrain of ballet, addressing some of the ethical issues arising in observation and interview, to provide a rationale for the design of a practical methodology for documenting and comparing classes. My position as an insider with multiple roles – dancer, teacher and choreographer – has enabled me to take differing perspectives on particular classes, perhaps thus shedding some light on the processes of selection and recall which shape the practical learning of dancing.

While drawn to documentation and analysis of the detail and minutiae of communication and learning within particular ballet classes, this research nevertheless also ultimately aspires to a wider resonance. It provides a survey of the class as a cultural, historical and ideological phenomenon in the wider context of ballet in the UK today, considering the practical implications of this for the development of dancers and choreographers of the future. My first chapter detailing recent historical events has begun to show that the class is currently affected by a range of societal, cultural and institutional factors emanating from beyond the narrow confines of the studio's particular and often private world; closer examination of examples of current classes may reveal what immediate impact such influences are having on the development of creative attitudes and capabilities in ballet.

In their comparison of qualitative research perspectives Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldböck draw attention to Jürgen Habermas' critique of a modern society in which "a narrow instrumental approach to rationality has become dominant", and in which "science and technology have come to function as ideology" (Alvesson & Sköldböck 2009 p148). They describe how Habermas contrasts the objectified logic of a social system dominated by money and power with the notion of the 'lifeworld', borrowed from phenomenology, encompassing human meaning, interpretation and understanding of

concrete experience (ibid. p149). His theory of communicative action calls for a higher form of rationality inherent in “the strength of the good, well-founded argument” (ibid. p151), in order to contest and question social and cultural norms through emancipatory investigation. Alvesson & Sköldberg highlight as a value of independent research its ability to pose questions which go against widely established and accepted views and interrogate their underlying assumptions (ibid. p163).

This seems a highly appropriate approach for examining the class as it manifests both within and outside ballet's hegemonic institutions. The research challenges the ballet community's often “uncritical acceptance of common perceptions, either as a result of manipulations by an elite or because the cultural tradition transmits norms and taken-for-granted beliefs” (ibid. p153), as well as its current enthusiastic adoption of scientific training approaches and thinking. A critical theory approach nevertheless requires a thoughtful balancing in analysis of the specificities of empirical material with a wider theoretical understanding of the social structures and dynamics which surround them. Reflexive awareness of the unavoidably situated perspective of the researcher is needed in shaping a methodology with an appropriately critical wider dimension.

2.2 Scope of the research

Before outlining the methodology devised it is necessary to clarify what this study addresses, and what is beyond its scope. The field research undertaken aimed to provide a snapshot of current ballet teaching practice within certain parameters:

- National. For reasons of feasibility and cost all field research for this project has taken place within the UK. But in addition my experience and perspective are based in my career training and working professionally as part of a UK dance culture. As a performer I toured extensively both nationally and

internationally, and benefited as a professional from the visits of international teachers, or my own visits to do class with other companies and teachers. However the vast majority of my dance learning and experience has taken place within the British ballet tradition; this has given me a more grounded starting point for observing and reflecting on current ballet teaching in Britain, also facilitating access to a range of teachers. Ballet is nevertheless an international phenomenon, with historic distinctions between national ballet cultures and schools of training now less clearly defined, and institutions increasingly porous to outside influences. I have therefore drawn on written texts and other materials from different ballet cultures where they may shed fresh light on aspects of ballet training in the UK and potential influences from overseas.

- Dance culture in the UK is very much centred on London which outstrips other UK regions and cities in the number and scale of its provision of dance companies, facilities and training institutions. However there are significant establishments and local dance cultures in other parts of the UK, and a nationwide spread of local dance schools offering the fundamentals of dance training at grassroots and pre-vocational levels. It was therefore important in the selection of classes for observation to try to reflect a wider national spread of provision. Thus in addition to classes at vocational and professional level observed in London, classes were observed in Leeds, Birmingham, Witney, Chilworth near Guildford, and Oxford.
- Although much ballet learning in the UK is undertaken by children, I have chosen not to look at practice in this area, concentrating instead on learners of 18 years and upwards. This aligns with my own experience as a teacher of ballet, which has been predominantly with adult learners; students, professional

dancers and teachers, and adult enthusiasts from beginners through to those with significant levels of training. The age range has spanned from adolescents through to dancers in their eighties, and levels of knowledge from complete beginners to seasoned professionals. Looking at adult learning has enabled me to focus on knowledge content and learning interactions without the added complexity of taking into account the progressive psychological and physiological changes of child development. It has also facilitated interviews and observations unbounded by child protection requirements and corresponding research ethics considerations. However it is important to recognise the fluid age boundaries which operate in much ballet training, especially outside formal educational institutions, in independent pre-professional or professional studio contexts, where talented students may be learning at very advanced levels before they are technically adult. It becomes very difficult in observing independent classes to exclude adolescent dancers who may not yet be 18 years old; a certain flexibility has therefore been necessary. On the one occasion where the class I was invited to observe clearly included such younger students, parents and another teacher were present and gave their verbal consent for the students to be observed and interviewed.

2.3 Issues of gender

In my choice of classes for observation I sought out suitable examples via my professional knowledge and contacts, and was guided in my choice by my desire to cover a range of classes for different constituencies in divergent circumstances, as well as by practical considerations of access. But I also endeavoured to get a balanced mix of male and female students and teachers.

Issues of gender equality in the ballet world have been very much in the news recently with scandals as to the treatment of female dancers such as that recently engulfing New York City Ballet (Kaufmann 2018, Pogrebin 2018), and as a longstanding rumble of discussion of the preponderance of male choreographers and company directors despite the larger numbers of female dancers entering the ballet world (Jennings 2013, Crow 2012). It might be argued that with male perspectives dominant in the programming of choreographic works, and the trend towards promoting a technologically informed physical fitness previously discussed, ballet's aesthetic is currently shifting towards a more athletic and masculine ideal and physicality, raising questions as to the nature of female perspectives and identity in ballet and how they may be represented. Recent discussion of gender fluidity has also manifested in the ballet world, for example the case of Chase Johnsey, identifying as genderqueer, who resigned from Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo and performed in female roles for a season with English National Ballet (Escoyne, 2018). Lukas Dhont's award winning film *Girl* tells the story of a transgender teenager striving to become a ballerina (Dhont 2018). I currently have a transgender student in one of my classes making the transition from male to female.

These are fascinating and thought-provoking situations which merit extensive research and debate. I have however chosen not to enter into these debates in this research. The vast majority of material that might be covered in ballet class is the same for male and female dancers; it is at the advanced levels of physical virtuosity, or potentially in the incorporation of material directly from or inspired by specific historic repertoire, that gender roles in danced content begin overtly to emerge and diverge. One might contend that gendered perspectives or biases in classes are brought into the studio by those individuals teaching and learning, in their attitudes and approaches to the work and each other. I would suggest that whatever the material, the mechanisms and strategies for learning and the acquisition of expertise that this research aims to

elucidate can apply to and be embraced by all students regardless of gender. It seems important that these pedagogical characteristics of the ballet class, which is so often unquestioned and taken for granted in its format and outward conventions, should be identified and opened up for initial scrutiny. One might then begin to consider to what extent there may exist underlying gender bias in the class, as an educational experience, curriculum or mode of teaching and learning, or in its material and the way it is presented; which may later translate into the unbalanced gender representation perceptible in professional career development, creative opportunities and employment. This would be a fascinating topic for further research.

2.4 Surveying the literature of practice and pedagogic knowledge

The field research of this study reflects contemporary practice and circumstance through a series of case studies undertaken from late December 2016 to early January 2018. In order to be able to begin to understand how these current manifestations of the ballet class have come about, it has been necessary to situate them within a fluid and evolving body of knowledge and pedagogical tradition, reflecting and influenced by wider historical and cultural contexts. A starting point was therefore to look for historic and theoretical accounts of the class within ballet's own specialist literature.

At this point in the 21st century ballet's technical literature still remains relatively sparse; most dancers cannot read dance notation; and the vast majority of dance learning continues to take place in unmediated practical interaction between experienced practitioners and novices. In ballet this learning includes not only the development of physical and technical capabilities, but also involves the passing on to future generations of an accumulated history of movement principles and concepts, the codified elements which form the basic movement palette of many ballets, and in the

case of historic repertoire, of dance works as artefacts.

However ballet as a way of dancing is gradually becoming more inscribed, in a historic process which had its beginnings in early attempts to capture dances in writing such as Feuillet's notation, first published in 1700. A proliferation of manuals about dancing emerged through the 18th century; followed in the 19th and early 20th century by defining technical treatises of such seminal teachers as Blasis and later Cecchetti and Vaganova. Not only did the 20th century see development and dissemination of two dominant systems of notation used to record choreographic works, but also recording technologies in audio and then video, enabling visual documentation and preservation of dance material external to the body and memory of the dancer. Dance in all its forms has now become a subject for theoretical study and writing by scholars in academic as well as performance or studio settings.

In terms of the study of practice, a range of sources document ballet's codified technique and vocabulary. Technical dictionaries list ballet's vocabulary of steps, often illustrated either with schematic line drawings or photographed sequences of positions. Class structures and content are outlined in the syllabi of teaching organisations such as the Royal Academy of Dance and the Cecchetti Society, and in conservatoire courses of study (eg. Kostrovitskaya's textbook of the Leningrad School), or instructional videos by respected teachers (eg. David Howard, Maria Fay). These sources provide recipes for movement content and exemplary combinations, sometimes with prescribed music; but little explanation of intentions, processes of assemblage behind particular *enchaînements*, evidence of their effectiveness or expressiveness, or guidance on how material is communicated in the practical reality of actual classes. Photographic sequences such as those in Gretchen Ward Warren's compendium *Classical Ballet Technique* (Warren 1989) inevitably draw attention to perfected poses rather than the principles that construct them and the pathways that

link them, thereby perhaps unconsciously promoting a prioritisation of body shapes rather than movements.

Greater consideration of aims and intentions, and some pedagogic advice on delivery, may be found in technical manuals by historic teachers such as Blasis (1828), and more recently Joan Lawson (1988), Suki Schorer (1999), Rory Foster (2010), Roger Tully (2011), and Wilfride Piollet (2014). Ethnographic accounts also now provide insights into the experience of learning to embody ballet's technique and ideas: for example, Jennifer Jackson's 'My dance and the ideal body' (Jackson 2005), which argues for a somatic approach to balletic learning. Tantalising glimpses are afforded into the teaching practices of historic teachers through biographical material; and dancers' anecdotal recollections of their experience of such moments and the thought-provoking insights these can afford provide rich contributions towards building a picture of ballet's evolving knowledge. By way of example I would cite Dawn Lille Horwitz' evocative recollection of classes given by Michel Fokine (Horwitz 1979) or Joan Brady's troubled memories of her time at the School of American Ballet (Brady 1982), which are particularly suggestive as to the relationship of technique classes to ballet's evolving repertoire and styles. Some dancers while studying keep personal record of classes and their teachers' corrections and comments. Made contemporaneously to the happening such personal documents and verbatim accounts may be the only written evidence of what happens in particular classes. If accessible these might provide a treasure trove of historic information about teachers and how dancers experience classes; their content, functioning and specific concerns, whether physical, technical or artistic.

Yet currently much published academic research on ballet approaches it not from pedagogy but from science-based perspectives, for example exploring the anatomy, biomechanics, physiology and performance psychology of dancers as athletes, or the

neuroscience and cognitive aspects of dance activity and perception. I have instead chosen to look at ballet as a holistic artistic pursuit engaging the whole person, physical, mental, emotional and imaginative; and the ballet class as a unique learning format and curriculum with the potential to meet a wider range of educational aims beyond bodily training. To understand its evolving tradition I have thus taken an eclectic interdisciplinary approach in reading, investigating literature which looks at the issues of embodied and practical learning from historical, philosophical, cognitive, educational, or sociological perspectives, often finding analogies and illuminating parallel situations in discussion about training in other art forms and vocations, perhaps especially music. Such sources will be referenced and discussed both in contribution to the evolving theoretical framework constructed in the following chapters, but also in relation to the examples of practice that I observe and experience, as emerging in the later discussions of my findings.

2.5 Field research

In addition to historical and theoretical study, I have borrowed a social sciences approach in this study by choosing to address my questions through a series of brief case studies of ballet classes; aiming, as Martyn Denscombe puts it, “to illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe 2003 p30). The case study with its detailed “focus on relationships and processes” and use of “multiple sources and multiple methods” (ibid. p31) seemed the most appropriate research strategy for understanding the particular complexities of ballet class learning.

It could however seem that the broad reach and overview of a survey of a range of activity, and the detailed in-depth scrutiny that is a characteristic of case studies focusing on single examples of a situation, are incompatible. Years of professional experience have nevertheless made me aware of the immense variety and variability of

ballet classes; and the unqualified assumptions arising in some descriptions, of single instances or particular ballet cultures, served as a warning of the possibility of drawing unwarranted conclusions from a limited and highly specific setting. At the heart of my research is an interest to build a more nuanced and grounded picture of ballet's technique class as an educational format, to clarify its drawbacks and potential, especially in the area of the development of ballet dancers as artists, either interpreters or dance makers. Varied circumstances can contribute significantly to shaping and differently defining class content and learning. It thus felt important to acknowledge and reflect the diversity of purposes and motivations of classes and learners in order to contextualize the detail of processes of learning as observed in specific cases.

Through these studies not only the teaching and learning practices of the classes but also their dance content might be compared. Ballet classes make manifest ballet's accumulated transferable knowledge, and inscribe it in the body of the dancer. Classes in their evolving relationship to the development of ballet's repertoire can play a vital role; both in maintaining the skills and knowledge required to perform choreography of the past, but also in building new skills to feed into the generation of choreographic works in the future. The class can be seen as the collective memory and archive of ballet's community of practice, while simultaneously a research resource of dance material and techniques on which dancers and choreographers can draw.

In a learning experience where the specific knowledge studied can be almost inaccessible independently of the class, the selection and structuring of content within the time students spend participating in the studio therefore take on a particular weight and significance in the way they shape perceptions. Messages and information about ballet as a way of dancing can be inherent in the choice and structuring of its vocabulary and its musical accompaniment, as much as in the bodily and verbal communications of the teacher. As in other undocumented oral and embodied

traditions, what is ignored or not included in practice for regular repetition and absorption can be lost from the community's memory and understanding; what is selected for transmission or unconsciously reiterated profoundly forms the developing dancer and body of ballet's repertoire both past and to come. The responsibility of the teacher in selecting and composing class content is therefore considerable.

However accounts of ballet classes are often composite pictures built up from observation of a series of similar and repeated classes over time. Examples of this include Hall 1977, Mazo 1978, Alter 1986, Juhasz 2003, and Aalten 2004, which provide evocative but generalised constructions. Authentically situated examples of particular tasks, real interactions and their immediate consequences have sometimes been captured powerfully in the immediacy of field notes about specific kinaesthetic learning experiences in other dance forms, such as those described by Sally Ann Ness (Ness 1992) and Jaida Kim Samudra (Samudra 2008), which begin to illuminate how embodied dancing knowledge and know-how may be passed from one generation to the next. In planning my field research it seemed that focusing on the detail of an individual ballet class rather than a series of classes over time might reveal specific relationships between the elements contributing to the learning within the class. These are here categorised as the teacher, the learners, the dance content and the musical accompaniment; framed by the spatial environment, time framework, and wider considerations of institutional setting and culture. By gaining an insight into the immediate experience of dancers in a particular class one might be able to identify examples, or their lack, of creative thinking in action.

The data collection methods chosen for each case study therefore were:

- Observation of a single class
- Documentation of the class through field notes and/or, where feasible and agreed, video footage to enable in depth analysis

- Group interview with class participants (focus group) where feasible
- Individual interview with class teacher
- Access to contextual information (teacher biographies, course outlines and publicity, informal conversation etc.)
- Reflective writing

Analysis of observed class content and happenings could be triangulated with the information divulged by teachers and students in interview as to their intentions and perceptions, and where appropriate situated within institutional contexts and their wider educational priorities. All these written sources were used to compile profiles of the observations, which include information as to the learning context of each class, a biography of the teacher, and an account of the class content including notes as to musical accompaniment; these profiles can be found as an appendix. A list of research data generated, interview questions and sample letters of consent are also attached as appendices.

I began my research process with a pilot study of a class within the public domain on YouTube. The potential to view and review this class provided an opportunity to develop a method for documentation and verbal transcription, and devise an observation note-taking format for use in the field where time would be at a premium. The slow process of repeated viewing and transcribing also provoked reflection on particular happenings that helped to formulate a list of questions for the interviews to accompany live observations.

2.6 Observations and their documentation

Observing classes can raise complicated and sometimes problematic issues for the researcher. Although it describes a rehearsal rather than a class process, in

preparation for theatrical performance with verbal content rather than dance, Gay McAuley's paper 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal' describes some of the difficulties of documenting studio processes (McAuley 1998). It chimes powerfully with the experience of observation of dance working sessions, providing thought-provoking guidelines to observation in this area. In commenting on an evolving process of recording rehearsals at the Centre for Performance Studies of the University of Sydney, McAuley noted how the practice has historically shifted from notes taken by an academic observer to the use of audio and then video recording, with one camera and later two; she warns as to how the different perspectives that these methods each bring may colour the emerging accounts:

“Each of these methods of recording and documenting tends to privilege different aspects of the process; each reveals certain attitudes to both the rehearsal process and the analytical enterprise – and indeed subsequent analyses will be strongly marked by the perceptual framework constructed by the chosen method of documentation.”

(McAuley 1998 p76)

The bulk of video material generated by rehearsal documentation inevitably requires significant editing, raising the need to clarify the distinction between documentation and the analysis and interpretation which follows it. There is an inevitable element of selection in any process of documentation; I became aware of this when initially experimenting with the verbal transcription of a class from video, and later in my clumsy attempts to capture whole classes live with one camera. But the later analysis of data collected is even more intrusive, needing to be handled with great sensitivity if “the whole fragile relationship of trust” between observers and the artists observed is to be preserved for further collaboration (ibid. p76).

McAuley sees similarity with the situation of the field ethnographer, and likens rehearsal documentation to the ethnographic model of participant observation, combining immersion in the situation and community with a researcher's external perspective, striving to maintain what Margaret Mead called “the balance between

empathic involvement and disciplined detachment” (Mead quoted in McAuley 1998 p77). McAuley raises the problems of power relationships between observer and observed, and how the very presence and awareness of an observer can affect the process under scrutiny. One of the classes I studied was very clearly designed to be observed by potential employers, and as such was less revealing of everyday working behaviour than I would have liked. The pilot class I analysed, transmitted as part of World Ballet Day 2014, also raised questions as to how much this overtly filmed live relay accurately reflected authentic interactions in more private daily sessions. But however discreet and unobtrusive the observation might be, there is increasing recognition among anthropologists that all situations observed and described are inevitably mediated; not just by the subjects' response to being observed, but also by what the observer brings as individual perspective, and later by the viewpoint of the reader.

Over the period of my research I have continued to attend regular classes with Roger Tully and occasional classes with other teachers. I found myself developing an observational practice of documenting classes I attended in field notes after, in part to develop note-taking efficiency, but also as personal investigation into my own capacity for retention of learning, and the workings of my dance memory. These field notes have included both the combinations set and the questions and discussions arising from my own and colleagues' execution of them. The exercise of immediately recalling the class content triggers memories as to comments, discussions and other class happenings and sensory observations; also my own thoughts, feelings and experience in addressing particular technical challenges and dancing moments.

However the vividness of such impressions can soon fade and be overlaid by other similar dance class experiences, making it hard to distinguish particular events from a range of very similar ones; and for moments of striking revelation or particularly apt

comments to be frustratingly lost. Following the class, in recall the dancer is likely to remain with a substrate of unconscious knowledge absorbed, and a highly selective conscious memory of a few salient moments; this represents the tip of an iceberg of sensory experience and experiential learning. Thus however soon after the event and comprehensive are field notes taken of personal experience, they already represent a process of major involuntary editing.

This experiment has not only been revealing about how my memory as a dancer works, what fades and what is retained; but has also raised an interesting ethical consideration around balletic material as a shared language. Dancers memorise material for immediate use in class; later they may re-use and recycle what they have retained in their personal and shared practice and classes they themselves teach. In teaching I have “borrowed” fragments and sequences of a class “text” and adapted them in another to meet the needs of different students, or transformed them through their execution with different music. This after all is how ballet’s technical knowledge has traditionally been absorbed and accumulated, through partial and selective remembrance. I have also noticed how my written notes on class can unconsciously elaborate on what was actually said, filtering it through my own understanding and assumptions, as I attempt to make my experience comprehensible and understand its relevance. As an oral and practical heritage passed down from one generation to the next ballet’s material is mutable, open for diverse interpretation, editing and modification to accommodate differing circumstances, and essentially freely reusable by dancers who experience it.

However once documented such material becomes fixed; and with its recording potentially come questions of ownership, and disagreement as to what is a “correct” interpretation. This is of course very evident in the documenting of choreographic works, but potentially can also affect teaching practice through its formalisation in

syllabi and training methods. An embodied tradition which sanctions sharing, borrowing, modifying and change, potentially opens a door to practices of creative repurposing of dance material. A culture of centrally imposed set content with more tightly structured and defined material arguably limits opportunities for the development of creative behaviours and autonomy, both in the dancers who must perform it, but also in the teachers who must “deliver” it.

As an insider in the ballet world I am reporting on a culture that I am a part of. This has facilitated access to some classes and possibly put some individuals more at their ease because of an assumption of my insider knowledge of what they were doing; I hope that it has also enabled me to bring a deeper embodied understanding and empathy to analysis of some of the phenomena observed. McAuley raises the interesting question here of whether artists should document, observe and analyse their own practice in what might be seen as an autoethnographic process. She warns of the limitations that observing artists bring, with perspectives on the process that although unique and deep may also be partial and unbalanced, unable to reflect the whole. I have been aware that I bring my own prejudices and assumptions to what I see and as such whilst acknowledging them in analysis must remain consciously reflective to keep them in check. As McAuley also points out, on a purely practical level responsible observation is time consuming and absorbing:

“...observation is, in my experience, a full-time role which precludes even taking responsibility for sound recording or camera operation, so I would suggest that there are serious methodological problems for someone who has a major creative involvement with the production also attempting to observe and analyse the whole of the process.”

(McAuley 1998 p81)

As a practitioner I can attest to the difficulty of balancing reflective written research and studio practice, giving both the time that they demand.

2.7 Film and field notes: writing about dancing

Judy Van Zile argues for the use of Labanotation in recording dance and movement material for ethnographic research (Van Zile 1999), however I do not have this specialist skill and the Benesh notation I learned decades ago is rusty and partial. Using either of these two systems would impose their particular theoretical perspectives and structuring principles on ballet class material. Using video or field notes to capture the original instructions as given is perhaps a more appropriate starting point for reflection on how the material communicated may in real life be open to individual interpretation and modification.

However permission was not always forthcoming for video documentation, even if only to be used by the researcher for the purpose of in-depth analysis, as had been possible with the pilot class material. Dance training institutions are obliged to safeguard their students and are also protective of their reputations, thus in some cases were unwilling to allow the generation of film material which they feared might find its way onto the internet or social media; despite the rigorous protections afforded by university research ethics policies. For the open professional classes consent needed to be sought informally in the moment because of unpredictable attendance. One teacher was concerned that if students thought they might be videoed they would not turn up, causing consequent loss of income. I am myself highly protective of adult beginner learners, who are often nervous and vulnerable, and need to know that the class provides a supportive private environment while they are coming to grips with a new and ambitious discipline. This can be just as true for professional dancers for whom class may provide a space for private individual study and experiment. For this reason it was not proposed to attempt to video such classes, but to use less invasive documentation methods, either to observe taking field notes, or to participate and make notes after.

For those classes in which I actively participated alternative strategies to conventional observation and documentation needed to be found. In the case of the adult beginners' class I taught, I wrote an account of the set class content; with reflective commentary on my experience of teaching it repeatedly over the course of a term, the problems encountered, what I learned and what the learners achieved. I also wrote field notes and a full account of class content for the Roger Tully class in which I participated as a dancer on the day of the class.

In the interests therefore of consistency and enabling comparison on a more equal footing I decided not to present as part of my research data filmed material or images (other than reference links to material publicly available on the internet). Where video documentation was not possible or permitted I had to rely on the taking of rapid field notes; which were supplemented after the event with further reflective writing, endeavouring to capture as much detail about my visits as I could remember. In the instances when I was able to film inexperienced footage myself I verbally transcribed it to facilitate analysis and comparison. This process of transcription originally undertaken for my pilot observation enabled a closer scrutiny of some examples of the communications of teachers, revealing the very particular combination of verbal and other content used to give information and feedback to dancers – who for the most part respond through their actions rather than through verbal means.

Sylvia Faure contends that the use of verbal language is an essential part of communicating the transmission of bodily competencies and *savoir faire* in the dance studio. For her dance cannot be considered in isolation from the social contexts in which it is “worked”; she draws on the thinking of Bakhtine and Bernard Lahire as to language's inherent role in social interchange and reflexivity (Faure 2000b p163). Her comparison of the very particular uses of language she observed used in teaching in

ballet and contemporary dance classes is revealing of the underlying values and beliefs she perceives embodied in these different genres. She draws a distinction between the languages expressing non-discursive and discursive practices; contrasting that used in the transmission of pre-reflexive technical and bodily knowledge through practical learning with the explicit reflexive language of theoretical knowledge and academic learning. In recognising the challenge of communicating non-discursive knowledge as in the class, she cites Michel de Certeau's powerful metaphor of theoretical knowledge as situated on a cliff edge contemplating the sea of non-discursive experience (Faure 2000b p164).

Part of the challenge of this research project has been finding ways verbally to describe and analyse a phenomenon which is so largely non-verbal; and to provide verbal discussion of embodied experience, finding ways to talk about it for the information of those who do not experience it, as well as for those learning. It has therefore become something of a point of principle in this research not to resort to visual imagery but to present data and its discussion in written form, as part of developing a practice of writing about ballet.

2.8 Interviews

It seemed important that as part of the case study of a class there should be an opportunity for those participating to share thoughts, feelings, intentions and motivations which might not be outwardly discernible to external observation. If the class is deemed an intentional activity rather than mindless repetition of known exercises, then the conscious purposes driving actions and behaviours needed to be voiced.

Ballet classes are fleeting and ephemeral; often part of tightly structured schedules, or

taking place in shared spaces, allowing little time during or after for discussion and reflection with teachers or participants. In some situations it was impossible formally to interview, or student interviews were truncated by their other scheduled commitments. While aiming to follow a standardised list of questions to generate comparable responses, my research interviews were ultimately less formally structured, adapting in the moment to accommodate necessary questions arising in the event, or, where there was insufficient time, to try to prioritise particular issues emerging from observation. While adult class participants were more relaxed about giving their views, as a guiding principle I committed to ensuring the anonymity of students participating in the class. This was both to honour the safeguarding commitments of their institutions, but also to enable students to feel confident to speak freely in interview about their class experience, which can be intensely personal and sometimes difficult.

On the other hand it felt very important that schools and teachers should not remain anonymous. Studying the class as a process of evolving knowledge, activity and aesthetics makes it imperative to situate teaching practices within their historic and geographic context, seeing classes in relation not only to ballet's particular pedagogic and choreographic custom and practice, but also in the wider cultural context of their time and location. Classes and balletic knowledge do not exist in the academic high ground of objective technical rationality, but in what Donald Schön calls the "indeterminate swampy zones of practice" of real life (Schön 1987 p3). Teachers in an oral and embodied tradition can be seen as embodying and transmitting not only their own experience but a composite knowledge shaped by aspects of those who came before them as part of their training and wider dance education; teachers, choreographers, other dancers, and likewise institutions. There is a widely shared notion of lineage in ballet training, whereby the roots of technical and stylistic characteristics can be traced back through a complex family tree of relationships to reveal previous schooling or dancing environments. Acknowledging the learning and

dancing experiences of teachers through investigation of their own teachers and professional activity potentially casts valuable light on their practice and values, and thus on their classes. The featuring of specific teachers and learning institutions also acknowledges and potentially gives appropriate credit for their particular contribution to ballet's collective and communal knowledge in line with academic standards of referencing. The researcher in quoting the comments of ballet practitioners nevertheless needs to be aware of the small community in which they circulate and have ever shifting working relationships; and therefore be sensitive to the protection of informants when quoting more controversial or critical contributions.

It appeared that there might be tremendous scope for uncovering the un verbalized learning processes taking place within the ballet class through the explication interview technique. Developed from the practice of introspection as elaborated by Paul Vermeresch, this very carefully worded anthropological interview technique aims to elicit description of “the unfolding of a lived action” (Cazemajou 2015), and can be used to access embodied cognition, the tacit knowledge of practitioners; what is taken for granted and rarely verbally articulated. It guides interviewees into reliving certain situations “to enable the researcher to document the processes at work during the emergence and course of a practice” (Gore, Rix-Lievre, Wathelet & Cazemajou in Skinner ed. 2013 p129) and as part of Skinner's book on the use of interviews in ethnographic contexts Gore, Rix-Lievre, Wathelet and Cazemajou discuss its use in three studies of the activities of rugby refereeing, cooking and learning yoga. They contend that while observation and conventional interview techniques can provide some useful general understanding of a field, they cannot uncover elements of experience that “can neither be observed nor explicitly formulated” (ibid. p128). Vermeresch also points out the difference between what subjects think they are doing, the conscious personal interpretations of perceptions and actions that may be captured in conventional interviews – and what they are really doing pre-reflectively, which the

explicitation interview technique aims to uncover (Vermersch cited in Cazemajou 2011 p24).

Cazemajou advises that for the explicitation technique to work when used in the investigation of experiences which may be frequently repeated, the focus of the interview needs to be on specific moments (Cazemajou 2011 p24). Ultimately the limited time available for the case studies of this exploratory project, and the need to gather other information to contextualize the day's learning by interview as well, meant that it was impractical to take the time needed fully to explore the explicitation technique with interview respondents. It did however lead me to ask interviewees to describe a specific moment from the class observed, to attempt to gather brief insight into the experience and preoccupations of learners and teachers in moments of dancing or classroom interaction, and their pre-reflective rather than consciously rationalized focus and motivation. For the most part without the structured lead-in of the explicitation interview technique this gave rise to more generalised personal reflections about dancing; but just occasionally there were vivid descriptions of the rapidly succeeding thought processes of the dancer in action, which suggest that fuller application of the explicitation interview technique with sufficient time and resource could bring very interesting results.

2.9 Outsider or insider perspective?

In this research my status as a practitioner has meant that I have brought to the observation and documentation of classes the differing perspectives of my own experience – as dancer, teacher, choreographer and now researcher. My experiential knowledge as a ballet insider has informed my external observations; but I have also had to scrutinise my own subjective experience as a learner and teacher through autoethnographic examination of my own practice in classes as a dancer and teacher,

considering how it has framed my perspective.

Accounts of the case studies generated for this research can be considered within the context of ethnographic writings about dance practice, and the increasing use of anthropological approaches more widely in performance studies. Observation and particularly participant observation as a “native ethnographer” from within the community under scrutiny can potentially shine light on aspects of class process which are normally unspoken and taken for granted. John Matthews in his investigation of training for performance resolved as much as possible actively to participate in the diverse trainings he examined, admitting a basic assumption which might serve as guidance for others researching embodied practices:

“... if anyone seeks to contribute to knowledge, he or she should contribute to the disciplines within which it is produced, recited or sedimentised, and must endeavour to speak *to* and *with* individuals therein not *for* or *about* them.”
(Matthews 2011 p25, emphases as in the original)

Yet Anne Cazemajou writes tellingly of her transition from dancer to researcher and the problems of finding out how to deal with “one’s own subjective experience”. She cites Kenneth Pike’s useful distinction between etic and emic perspectives:

“The etic viewpoint studies behaviour as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system.”
(Pike quoted in Cazemajou 2011 p26)

In her account of her process of research into the contemporary dance classes taught by Toni D’Amelio that she regularly attended, Cazemajou described the difficulty of disengaging from a class that as a dancer she was totally invested in - in her own words “addicted to” the teacher’s process. In order to be able to comprehend not only the “what” of learning but the “how” (ibid. p21-22), she realised that she had to put distance between herself and the class to be able to make sense of it, describing how the insider participant’s perspective differs from that of the outside observer:

“...as I first came to this dance class as a student – not as a researcher – and at

the time had no intention of researching this context of transmission, I had not been observing the process of acculturation that I underwent and which had gradually made me part of this group. My knowledge and posture were entirely dedicated to action. Therefore, once I wanted to understand this process, to examine it with a critical eye, I was stuck too close to it. I could practise the rule, but I could not theorize about it. I had entered the contract as a dancer and had plunged entirely into the system of belief it entailed.”

(ibid. p22)

Cazemajou's frank appraisal of the research drawbacks of her dancerly attitude to the class has served as a warning in the context of my own study and reflection on my experience as a regular attender of Roger Tully's classes over a number of years. In writing about this class, sometimes half jokingly described as a “cult class”, as one of those studied for this research, I have become particularly aware of my acculturation as part of a group similar to D'Amelio's involved students, with trust and belief in the knowledge and ideas of a charismatic and inspiring teacher. Cazemajou eventually had to leave for a year to disengage herself from the class community. I hope that my experiences over the year of field research of observing other very different classes as, if not an outsider to ballet, at least an outsider to a particular class culture, has provided some counterbalance, and through the exercise of comparison enabled me to examine my personal experience of ballet learning in Roger Tully's environment with more detachment. Examining the class for evidence of the development of artistry and creativity would necessarily require an ability to discern what may have been accepted without question over time, as well as critical distance in examining the detail of the dancing; this can be difficult for an insider within a class habituated to the norms of its particular practice.

2.10 To summarise

Designing a qualitative research methodology for examining the ballet class through a series of case studies has brought to the fore some of the practical issues around documenting field research in a range of different dance learning environments. While

video documentation has enabled in depth scrutiny and analysis after the event of both dance material and the modes of communication used by teachers, it was only possible to do this on a small number of occasions. Written field notes and supplementary reflective writing drawing on immediate memory were therefore an essential basic source, as an alternative to verbal transcripts of studio instructions and interactions captured on video. McAuley (1998) nevertheless reminds us of the selective nature of all types of documentation of observations. To provide a counterbalance to what has been externally observed, interviews with teachers and dancers have endeavoured not only to shed light on their conscious intentions and perspectives, but perhaps to begin to reveal something of their thinking processes in the moment of doing.

My own position as an insider observing a phenomenon of which I am a part has required a reflexive approach, and consciousness of the nuances of bias, in an enquiry similar in ethnographic approach to the documentation and analysis of theatre rehearsals that McAuley discusses (McAuley 1998). But additionally, in a spirit of critical theory the research aims to show connection between the detail and personal minutiae observed in specific classes, and the bigger context of British ballet's institutions and current culture. It is hoped that a wider perspective will inform my reading of accounts of current practice in selected classes, and thereby focus interpretation of the significance of the teaching and learning choices of practitioners, and how these may contribute to or detract from the development of dancers' creativity either in interpretation or in the making of dances. To this end later discussions of data emerging from specific occasions are framed in relation to wider thinking.

The next chapter examines existing scholarship to build a theoretical model of the nature of learning in the ballet class as a starting point for critical interpretation of the following studies of ballet classes in the field.

Chapter 3: Learning in the ballet class: theoretical frameworks

This chapter draws on theoretical texts from a range of disciplines to elucidate how the ballet class functions as the primary locus of ballet's learning. Understanding this requires initially defining and clarifying notions of education and training and their relationship. I state the premise that the ballet class is an embodied practice, and a body of knowledge transmitted orally from generation to generation, thus necessarily differing in its pedagogy from the academic teaching and learning of inscribed matters. At the heart of the class is the need to develop both technique and artistry, requiring discussion of the contested understandings of practitioners of their definition and relationship. This chapter will then examine such powerfully relevant concepts as the habitus, tacit knowledge, reflective practice, and the development of expertise, as characteristics of learning in the ballet class and what Donald Schön has called other "deviant traditions" in professional education (Schön 1987 p15). Building a detailed picture of the phenomenon of balletic learning in the class and its epistemology may reveal how aspects of this process either contribute to or hinder the development of creativity in the emerging dancer.

3.1 Education or training?

Discussions around the acquisition of ballet's knowledge and practical skills are often couched in terms of an opposition between education and training; requiring initial clarification of these loaded terms. Educational philosopher Richard Peters saw the value of education as initiating learners "into activities which are worthwhile in

themselves... intrinsically valuable" (Winch & Gingell 2015 p71); the term can be seen not only to cover a wider upbringing and socialisation through life itself, but also, as suggested by its etymology, the bringing or leading forth of a learner by a teacher. Graham McFee quotes Lawrence Stenhouse's identification of four processes that make up education, and thereby reveal the multiple roles of the teacher: training, instruction, initiation and induction (Stenhouse 1975 p80). Training for 'the acquisition of skills' (Stenhouse 1975 cited in McFee 2004 p26) to enable successful performance is thus only part of a wider process of education in which "those with knowledge or skill... teach them to those that lack them" (McFee 2004 p27). Training is perceived as limited in scope and aimed at an external goal, such as acquiring a specific competency or a good job. It is often associated with instruction, drilling and indoctrination, allowing "little or no room for autonomous action" (ibid. p28).

By contrast, for McFee education aims beyond mere competency at knowledge and understanding; it must have direction and structure, while offering the individual freedom to make choices and take deliberate action, engendering an ability to discriminate, and ultimately aiming to make the pupil independent of the teacher. He recommends that material for study must therefore allow for personal interpretation, the exercise of imagination, the making of mistakes, and the solving of problems by working through difficulties. It is both human and rational; including the transmission of principles to understand and standards to aspire to, and built on respect for the person (ibid. pp29-30).

I contend that the ballet class has within it the potential for development of all these human cognitive abilities and characteristics; yet it also importantly includes processes of physical training necessary for acquiring the complex movement skills which are the creative medium of the classical dancer and choreographer. The central question is therefore how a fruitful combination of both education and training in the class might

contribute to the formation of creative dance artists; and whether today's ballet classes maintain these different approaches in constructive balance. Building a comprehensive picture of the dimensions of the study of ballet that occur within a particular class can elucidate to what extent it is simply physical training to enable meeting externally imposed goals, or if it succeeds in bringing forth the creative individual through the medium of their dancing.

This chapter provides a closer examination of what happens in the ballet class to reveal a subtle process of learning through training; which makes use of both unconscious and conscious states in the development of expertise and discernment.

3.2 Ballet as oral and embodied learning

In his book *How Societies Remember* Paul Connerton distinguishes between two forms of social practice for preserving the past, respectively incorporating practices and inscribing practices (Connerton 1989). Incorporating practices involve the memorisation of actions and the messages they communicate through physical doing; inscribing practices are the use of means of storage external to the body – such as writing, print, photographs, audio and video recording - for retaining information and memories (ibid. pp72-73). Learning to dance the ballet class is very much learning by doing, thus an incorporating practice; like playing a musical instrument, painting or craft skills. In learning practically how to dance it is highly unlikely that dancers will have relied on inscribing practices as learning strategies: reading about it in a book or periodical, attending a lecture, discussing it in a seminar or even reading a score. Some may have seen a live performance or watched an instructional video – but must then find a way to translate that external visual information into their own embodied action.

Looking at oral learning traditions in other arts forms sheds some light on ballet's learning by analogy, for example Lars Lilliestam's research into rock and folk musicians making music by ear (Lilliestam 1996). Lilliestam defines this as a process "to create, perform, remember and teach music without the use of written notation" (ibid. p195). He analyses the learning processes of contemporary musicians and likens them to the stages of learning that Albert B. Lord identified in his influential research into Serbian and Croatian epic singers (ibid. p197), namely:

Listening and memorising

Practising, sometimes under the tuition of an experienced practitioner

Performing to an audience

Listening and memorising involves the learning and assimilation of existing material, not simply the memorisation of complete songs and poems, but also within them formulas and schemas which Lilliestam defines as readymade combinations of elements, "building blocks", which can through their elaboration or modification be used as points of departure for composition, or provide material to be played with through the process of improvisation.

Marielle Cadopi and Andrée Bonnery in their study of dance apprenticeship mark three not dissimilar phases in the learning process, from observing through assimilating to performing, as it is condensed into the regularly repeated dance class:

- The teacher proposes a movement or phrase as a model; from which the learner forms an image. By imitating the dancer constructs a pattern of kinaesthetic information, an overall scheme of action for the movement.
- The movement is repeated till it becomes coordinated and regular in execution, so that it almost becomes automatic. This is facilitated by maintaining unchanging conditions for the execution, and dancers often make use of a studio mirror at this stage to self correct and refine their actions.
- The final autonomous phase is achieved when the dancer no longer needs to consciously control the movement but can turn their attention to other aspects of dancing.

Ballet's learning by doing also makes use of Lilliestam's schemas. The day's *port de bras*, while unique in its complete form, contains within it formulaic movement phrases, codified steps, and conventions of structuring which would be familiar to experienced dancers from countless other similar *ports de bras*. Crucial to the ability to absorb and remember schemas, and through copying to recreate them successfully, is repetition. For oral and embodied traditions, repetition is essential to survival, necessary to engrain the song, the story, the dance in bodily and social memory if it is to survive unwritten or unrecorded.

Mastering balletic skills thus involves acquiring knowledge through copying or imitating, repeating, and memorising; methods that are often grouped as rote learning and can be seen as intrinsic features of training. The use of repetition is often associated negatively with conditioning, as a means of embedding a desired behaviour; and can be considered lacking in educational and ethical value because it does not promote autonomous human action. Bloom's revised taxonomy of learning (see Mayer 2002) presents rote learning as the retaining of information without understanding, so that what is learned cannot be transferred. It comes under the taxonomy's most basic level of "remembering" and is seen as a passive, surface approach, unsuitable for higher education, rather than a deep approach whereby learners are enabled to make use of their learning in new ways.

Yet the reality of learning in the ballet class would seem to contradict Bloom's evaluation of the use of repetition. In the many ballet classes in which teachers are not adhering to a pre-existing syllabus but imparting freshly set *enchaînements*, dancers are on a daily basis potentially recombining their learning in new ways; using it to

perform unseen movement material which can be challenging in its complexity, difficulty and precision. Repetition of known elements is interwoven with the learning of new ones, using the familiar as a basis for exploring the unfamiliar. Instructions can be schematic in the extreme; leaving a huge number of micro decisions to be made as to how to realise them. Verbal explanation is only one of differing types of information available to the dancer, others include:

- Visual, seeing what the teacher and other dancers are doing
- Aural: musical accompaniment, teacher's non-verbal onomatopoeia
- Somatic and kinaesthetic awareness of the dancer's own body
- Tactile: with the floor, teacher touch
- Spatial: awareness of space and direction.

The dancer must instantaneously select and synthesize the information available to construct from it a personal interpretation of the task set. In today's world an increasingly literate and formalised approach to its study, and the development of modes of documentation that fix material external to the embodied memory of the dancer, are contributing to changes in the way that practitioners conceive and approach ballet as a way of dancing. Understanding these distinct modes of learning and passing on knowledge is important in clarifying how dancers may be educated within their field, and for grasping the implications of these modes for creative practice and the development of choreographers conversant with ballet's resources.

The complex reality of transmission of non-literate embodied knowledge requires subtle analysis.

Technique and artistry must both be acquired through engagement with the dancing content of the ballet class; and views on their definition, relationship and relative importance contribute to expand discussion around the question of whether the class should be considered as either a form of training or of education.

3.3 Defining technique

The ballet class is often described as the technique class; thus in identifying its educational scope it becomes necessary to define this widely used term. The following section will trace the roots of the concept of technique and tease out perceptions of what it is deemed to encompass within the ballet technique class, and how it relates to the contested concept of “artistry”.

Joseph Dunne analyses in detail Aristotle's discussions of different modes of learning and types of knowledge; *episteme* (theoretical), *techne* (productive) and *phronesis* (practical). *Techne* can be defined as “a reasoned state of capacity to make” (Aristotle cited in Dunne 2009 p249) and “a generative source of useful things” (Dunne 2009 p249), thus a rational form of productive knowledge, which through its generation of universal rules can seem closely related to general theoretical knowledge. *Phronesis* by contrast has no concrete end other than its own practice, and involves judgement in the moment in specific situations and derived from experience. Thus *techne* relates to making (*poiesis*) and *phronesis* to action (*praxis*).

Academic epistemic traditions have historically valued theory more than practice, and scientific knowledge over common sense, dismissing action for its “inability to contemplate” (Plato Theaetetus 172c-173b cited by Bourdieu trans. Nice 1990, p28). Dunne exposes the Aristotelian roots of the historic phenomenon of the higher esteem accorded to scientific and rational thinking in a quote from the Metaphysics:

“There the man of *techne* is firmly distinguished from the man who works merely by memory or from experience: “we think that knowledge and understanding... belong to *techne*... and we suppose *technitai* to be wiser... than men of experience... because they know the why and the cause...” “
(Aristotle Metaphysics 1.1.981a24-30 cited in Dunne 2009 p 252)

This privileging of theoretical knowledge persists to the present day. As Donald Schön,

in the forthright analysis which opens his powerful discussion of the problems of educating for professional practice, puts it:

“The greater one's proximity to basic science, as a rule, the higher one's academic status. General, theoretical, propositional knowledge enjoys a privileged position.”

(Schön 1987 p9)

The embodied knowledge and incorporated practice of dance therefore has a particularly tenuous foothold in academe.

Ben Spatz in his study of embodied knowledges identifies the roots of the concept of technique in Aristotle's categories of knowledge. He draws out the ambiguity of *techne*; inherently practical when contrasted with the abstraction of *episteme* as theoretical or scientific knowledge, yet “a coldly rational or mechanistic type of knowing” when compared to *phronesis* (Spatz 2015 p28). He pinpoints the double-faced nature of *techne*, part rational and part practical:

“We can take from these ambiguities a recognition of the slipperiness of knowledge categories in general, and also a certain double-edged significance pertaining specifically to *techne* as that which is simultaneously rational and practical, transmissible and context-dependent. The ambiguous connotations of *techne* haunt the concept of technique right up to the present day...”

(Spatz 2015 p28)

Spatz traces evolving understandings of technique since its emergence into the English language in the early 19th century. At that time the connotation was dismissive, technique as merely mechanical skill which must be transcended in the making of art; a persistent Romantic and negative notion which Spatz found continuing to inform the thinking of practitioners he studied for his research (ibid. pp28-9). This can also be seen as underlying the view of experienced ballet pedagogue Anna Paskevskaja, that the nurturing of choreographic potential is not the business of the ballet class. Albert Danielsson in his analysis of the phenomenon of creativity makes a thought-provoking distinction between “creativity in invention”, and “creativity in use”; in which rather than inventing something new, existing ideas are used in new ways (Danielsson 1992).

Paskevskaja similarly advocates a distinction between the artistic creativity manifested in the making of dances and what might be designated “small c creativity” in the ballet class:

“Finally, the teacher is not a choreographer. While, teachers are certainly creative and inventive in class, our creativity has two masters: the technique whose precepts guide us at all times, and our students whose interests we must serve... Choreographic concerns are beyond the scope of this work...”

(Paskevskaja 2005 p10)

Looking to how technique is conceived within dance scholarship and literature, from a philosophical perspective Graham McFee understands it essentially as “a set of fairly specific bodily skills” which must be acquired through “bodily training” (McFee 2004 p62). However in the context of contemporary dance Jaana Parviainen proposes an overarching definition of dance technique as a disciplinary knowledge encompassing “movement vocabulary, skill, style and method” (Parviainen 2010 p160); which begins to suggest more than just bodily skills. Coming from a less academic perspective, ballet teacher Dean Speer's book *On Technique* consists of a series of profiles and interviews with experienced and distinguished ballet teachers (mainly in USA and Canada) concerning their teaching practice, values and beliefs (Speer, 2010). He begins by asking his 17 interviewees to define technique; their idiosyncratic answers give some idea of the ambiguity of the concept amongst ballet practitioners, and the range of professional perceptions of its scope.

Speer probes the difference between conceptions of skill and technique, but this question is rarely clearly answered, reflecting wider educational variance. Robin Barrow inveighed against what he saw as indiscriminate use of the word “skill” in educational discourse, despite it covering a wide range of very different competencies, “physical, intellectual, perceptual, social, creative and interpersonal”, some more discrete and apparent than others (Barrow 1987 p188). Balletic competence could be

seen to require mastering a vast and complex set of interrelated skills, not all separately perceptible. Barrow contends that “a necessary condition of something's counting as a skill” is that it must be “developed, learned or acquired” (ibid. p188). However for a number of Speer's interviewees, drawing on years of encounters with students of diverse abilities, a skill can be a natural aptitude; it is technique that is learned. As Nina Novak puts it, “skill is born and the technique is accepted by long practice.” (Novak cited in Speer 2010 p114). Nevertheless, while some see skill as preceding technique others see “technique as the road to skill... skill the final product of all aspects of training coming together” (Sinclair, Speer 2010 p158). Consensus would seem perhaps to emerge that a skill is perceived as being both more specific and more superficial than technique. Technique emerges as a deeper level of underpinning embodied knowledge: in Gina Sinclair's words,

“...layer upon layer of information, applied to the mind and practiced by the body, that gives the student the tools needed to dance.”

(Sinclair, Speer 2010 p157)

Through the examination of six seminal thinkers Spatz builds an argument for technique as “vital, dynamic and complex”, rather than a defined body of existing knowledge to be passed from teacher to student. Referencing the thinking of first Marcel Mauss, then Michel Foucault, sociologist Nick Crossley and dance theorist Randy Martin, he provides a working definition:

“...technique is a kind of knowledge (Aristotle) that moves across time and space (Mauss) in ways deeply influenced but not entirely determined by social power relations (Foucault). It structures every aspect of human embodiment and works by indirect as well as direct means (Crossley). Furthermore, embodied technique of all kinds, from the mundane to the highly specialized, interacts in and through specific bodies and moments of practice (Martin).”

(ibid. p38)

Crossley opens up an idea of embodied technique as including capacities to evoke different states of consciousness and emotional states; seeing embodied technique encompass not only physical action, but also states of receptivity in a constant interaction that is both direct and indirect (Crossley in Spatz pp35-36). John Matthews

in his analysis of training which includes study of the cultivation of religious vocation, similarly opens up different dimensions of embodied knowledge, suggesting aspects of technical training that are both consciously embraced and beyond the merely physical (Matthews 2011). In accepting that transmissible embodied knowledge encompasses more than mechanical physical movement, it would seem to follow that these other dimensions of the whole person are impacted in the ballet technique class. This suggests that the emotional, spiritual and intellectual experience of the performance of balletic movement material cannot be separated from the physical embodiment of its specific actions. These dimensions of experience, crucial to enabling artistic use of ballet's technical knowledge, can be seen as integral to the dance material that learners are engaging in.

3.4 Defining artistry

Some teachers and theorists are ambivalent as to the place of artistry, and by extension art, within the technique class, even challenging the notion of ballet dancers as artists. Philosopher Graham McFee contends that dancers cannot be viewed as artists but are rather executants who instantiate dances defined and created by the choreographer as author of the artwork. He paints a picture of dancers as passive recipients who “must be taught the technique” through bodily training in order to become “the medium of the ‘speech’ of the choreographer”, and who are not thereby “taught to speak the *language of dance*” (McFee 2004 p62, emphasis as in the original). While accepting that this requires admirable “craft-mastery” and may allow of distinctive dancer interpretations, for McFee the construction of the choreographic work as a “performable” with potential to be “performed on other occasions, at other times and in other places, with other casts” (McFee 2011 p170) clearly delineates the choreographer as the artist:

“...dancers are not artists precisely because dance is a performing art, one with

a role for performers. And that is the role the dancers fill!"
(McFee 2011 p173)

McFee draws his examples of relationships between choreographer and dancer in the making of choreographies from a limited sample of the potential spectrum, even within more traditional ballet companies. But history suggests a wider range of collaborative relationships between ballet's choreographers and dancers. Within the Royal Ballet both Ashton and MacMillan involved their dancers in the creative process, often soliciting personal solutions to emerging movement problems and tasks, drawing inspiration from and making use of the idiosyncrasies of individuals' dancing, which can remain forever embedded in the choreographic text. More recently the programming of work from choreographers informed by contemporary dance experience and training (for example Wayne McGregor, Siobhan Davies and very recently Hofesh Schechter and Crystal Pite at the Royal Ballet), has overtly required creative and collaborative input from participating dancers in the making of new works.

The choreographer ultimately takes authorial responsibility and credit for the initiating ideas and decisions made in shaping works for presentation to an audience. But while McFee acknowledges that there can be no dance work unless it is realised in the performance of the dancers, he perhaps does not give sufficient credit for the role of the dancer in the work's process of creation. He states "one can only *perform* a dance when there is a dance – when it has been choreographed" (McFee 2011 p172, emphasis as in the original). However this does not address what the dancer is doing when responding to the ideas and instructions expressed by the choreographer, and translating what is communicated into an embodied response, as part of what can be deemed a creative dialogue. It is the dancer who instantiates in personal embodiment the choreographer's ideas, whether vague or prescriptive, and fulfills the speculative tasks set. There is a distinction to be made here, between performing what may already have been defined in rehearsal, and translating as yet unrealized expressive

aspirations into the medium of dance. McFee expresses his wish that the particular expertise and abilities of dancers should be appropriately appreciated, and valued equally to that of choreographers (ibid. p174); but here he seems to be assigning them to their obedient instrumental status in Balanchine's world as "the paint in the pot" (Bentley 1982 pp141-2).

It is not enough for dancers today to be passive participants or empty vessels to be filled in the making of new work. There is thus an imperative in professional preparation to ensure that ballet dancers, whether performers or potential choreographers, develop abilities to be sensitive and inventive in their response to the dance proposals made to them in the studio. The class becomes a primary locus for the formation of dancers who can integrate technique and capabilities for artistic contribution, preparing them not only for the challenges of physical execution of existing ballets, but also to take a more proactive and collaborative role in the generation of new choreographic works.

The artistry of the dancer is here better compared to that of the craftsman commissioned to turn the lump of wood into a beautiful piece of furniture. It is the dancer who is in direct creative dialogue with the material, the medium of dancing, rather than the choreographer. At the beginning of his discussion of technique and practice Spatz opts "to suspend that singular notion of art in favour of an older understanding of "arts" as fields of craft, technique and knowledge." This enables his consideration of performing arts such as dance and theatre alongside ritual, martial or healing arts as knowledge practices "defined by the embodied encounter of bodies", rather than as art forms seen from a spectator's perspective (Spatz 2015 p9); and thence consideration of dancers as artists in the sense of craftspeople. This echoes John Dewey's democratic conception, shared and endorsed by art educator Eliot Eisner (Eisner 2002), in which art is not "set upon a remote pedestal" but springs from

aesthetic enjoyment in wider human experience:

“The intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged.”

(Dewey 1980 p6)

This perspective understands the “work” of art as primarily being a process, rather than the resulting product.

However in the world of ballet’s vocational training the term artistry is often used more specifically to denote the performative and expressive aspect of dancing, associating it with notions of dance as fine art, and the performance of choreographic works as products; “a sense of style” (Gloria Govrin, Speer 2010 p60), or as in Roni Mahler’s list “dramatic interpretation, nuance, phrasing, subtlety... artistry if you will” (Roni Mahler, Speer 2010 p94). Speer’s own phrase “technique and its accompanying artistry” implies that the latter is something supplementary or separated from mastery of the mechanics of particular dance movement skills.

Yet if technique is to be conceived of as “a toolbox”, an important part of dancers’ learning is clearly to do with “knowing how to offer these tools to an audience” (Peter Boal, Speer 2010 p32). Some of Speer’s interviewees revealingly suggest that over and above the mastery of specific physical and dance skills, part of the development of technique in the class is cultivating abilities and dispositions to enable transcendence of mere mechanical competence into artistic performance:

“Technique is the knowledge base that allows one to create quality movement both kinetically and aesthetically... To master technique rather than simply move adequately, one must develop a consistency of productivity, an internal sense of musicality and timing, thoughtful processes, self-evaluation, and “the eye”: that ability to observe, then assimilate and internalize. Passion is also important. Passion to excel, search, discover.”

(Karen Gibbons-Brown, Speer 2010 p51)

If as Spatz maintains technique is transferrable knowledge, and if we conclude that artistry is part of technique, the development of artistry is therefore an integral part of

the learning content of the ballet technique class. Ballet's transferrable knowledge then includes, as Parviainen's broad definition implies, not only the mechanical how of steps and movements, but also how to make use of these and communicate them; a knowledge which integrates defined movement skills and performative artistry – and which thus moves the class beyond training into the broader realm of artistic education. Veteran UK teacher Richard Glasstone defines technique as effectively artistic control, how the dancer as artist makes use of their skills: “the ability to control the physical mechanics of any movement relative to the musical and (where appropriate) to the specific dramatic context in which the movement is being performed.” (Glasstone 2000 p1001). He cites the impression made by the legendary Nijinsky as an example of dancerly artistry:

“Clearly, what mattered was not the precise height of Nijinsky's jump, but the artistic effect he created with it... The pure mechanics of each movement must be intimately related to musical phrasing, rhythmic accent and dramatic context in order for the dancer's technique to be used as a *means* to an end, not as an end in itself. The latter is mere gymnastics.”

(ibid.)

This ability to make choices to adapt and modify execution to meet the requirements of a specific performative context chimes with Donald Schön's definition of artistry in the wider arena of his discussion of professional education: “the competence by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of practice... an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing” (Schön 1987 p13). This suggests that technique and artistry are inextricably linked, overlapping and arguably indissoluble, conjoined in the process of learning.

Nevertheless there remains among practitioners a perception of separation and competition between the cultivation of technique and artistry in the ballet class.

Concern is expressed by several of Speer's interviewees at the perceived danger in training of losing artistry in the driving for “pyrotechnics and kinetic capabilities” (Karen Gibbons-Brown, Speer 2010 p54), and greater gymnastic abilities “to catch attention,

as in a wow factor, rather than developing for the beauty of the movement itself” (Gina Sinclair, Speer 2010 p161). Evidence for practitioner concerns about the importance and potential loss of artistry tends to be anecdotal, or from limited verbatim sources such as Speer's interviews. Discussion of the place of this aspect of dancers' learning is largely absent from dance science led research which mainly focuses either on the physiological and physical fitness aspects of class content, or the athletic rather than artistic performance psychology of vocational and elite dancers. This emphasis builds an unbalanced and partial picture of a multifaceted human activity, thereby potentially undermining the validity of findings and recommendations. More systematic research is needed to substantiate what are frequently heard claims as to the loss of artistry; but also a closer examination of the mechanisms whereby dancers acquire their practical balletic knowledge.

3.5 Bourdieu and the Logic of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu, in his study *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu trans. Nice, 1990) analysed in depth the assimilation of practical knowledge through embodied learning. In investigating such processes he questioned the validity of research methods which claimed to be objective, and the appropriateness of rational theorising and documentation through tables and diagrams. Among other theoretical standpoints emerging more recently, Bourdieu has also attacked structuralism's privileging of linguistic interpretation over language as practical communication, drawing connection with art historical debates in which the work of art, rather than a sensuous symbolic object, becomes “a discourse to be decoded”, “seen from the point of view of the spectator not the creator”; and the slippage in thinking in structural anthropology “from the model of reality to the reality of the model” (ibid. p39).

In short Bourdieu challenges the inability of theoretical reason to see the limitations of

its own particular stance in its view of practice. From his fieldwork he drew out an alternative “logic of practice” adequately to reflect not only the daily life and world-view of his research subjects, but more generally “the practical mode of knowledge which is the basis of ordinary experience of the social world” (Bourdieu trans. Nice 1990, p25). Although Algerian village life may seem a long way from the dance studio, some of the conclusions he reaches from his study of non-literate rural communities have powerful relevance to our understanding of the transmission of knowledge through the class as the central social gathering of ballet's community of practice.

Bourdieu sees the need to escape objectivist viewpoints and recognise an active practical relation to the world which imposes its material presence, “with its urgencies, its things to be done and said” (ibid. p52). At the heart of his analysis is the notion of *habitus*, “a system of acquired, permanent, generative dispositions” (ibid. p53);

“structuring structures... which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”

(ibid. p290)

Although he is looking at the *habitus* primarily as a means of unconsciously generating and reinforcing a social culture, this concept resonates with the process of cultivation of accepted dancerly dispositions and technical abilities through the traditional ballet class, which builds on the accumulated experience of previous generations of dancers to form shared “schemes of perception, thought and action” (ibid. p54) which unconsciously shape and colour future experiences and behaviours:

“The *habitus* – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product.”

(ibid. p56)

Particularly noteworthy is the way in which the *habitus* regenerates itself as a form of conditioning to certain circumstances. Its practical responses generate a disposition to perceive the world in a particular way, which in turn perpetuates and reinforces certain

types of response, tending “to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.” (ibid. p54). It favours continuity and regularity over both the mechanical and the spontaneous, and is resistant to change. However, within the range of possible thoughts, perceptions, actions and expressions that are determined by the social and historical conditions in which it emerges, it allows limited freedom of action and thought in “regulated improvisations” (ibid. p57).

This closely describes what happens in the unseen ballet class where fresh material for the day is set by the teacher. The class begins at the barre, revisiting fundamental elements and understandings which are progressively applied, developed and manipulated in the “regulated improvisations” of the day's *enchaînements*. Class content is neither exact reproduction of existing material, nor unfettered invention of new movement; and in addition to the dancing itself, conventional working approaches and attitudes are tacitly instilled and reproduced. The teacher through the selection of material, the instruction and feedback given as to its execution, and their own modeling of accepted professional behaviour and values, unconsciously conveys the *habitus* of the ballet dancer that they in turn will have historically absorbed from their own teachers.

Bourdieu contrasts two modes of acquisition of such practical sense. One is drawn from sport, the notion of “a feel for the game” in which incorporated history in the form of the *habitus* and objectified history of the field, knowledge of the game's explicit rules and defined time and space, come together and make it possible for the player to anticipate the future and act accordingly. The combination of personal experience of the game and knowledge of its objective structures gives both a subjective sense of it, in terms of meaning, *raison d'être*, orientation and outcome, as well as an objective mastery of its specific regularities and recognised “sensible practices” (ibid. p66). The

individual consciously enters into a quasi contractual agreement to abide by the rules of the game; and from the view point of his or her existing disposition confronts the game as an external field with its own arbitrary rules to be learned, similar to a foreign language, and often taught in an institutional setting constituted for that purpose.

By contrast the individual does not consciously enter social fields generated through a “long slow process of autonomization” but is born into them unaware, totally absorbed through a gradual and unconditional process:

“...the long dialectical process, often described as 'vocation', through which the various fields provide themselves with agents equipped with the *habitus* needed to make them work, is to the learning of the game very much as the acquisition of the mother tongue is to the learning of a foreign language.”

(ibid. p67)

In this model of primary learning language is not taught, but experienced and learned through the actions of speaking and listening; the individual coming to think in the language. Education occurs constantly within the social group, but without recourse to specific teachers or designated occasions; thus “practical mastery is transmitted through practice, in the practical state, without rising to the level of discourse.” (ibid. p73-4). The earlier the learner enters into this type of game, the less conscious the learning process; and the greater the unawareness of the underlying presuppositions which are perpetually reproduced in the circular process of the *habitus*, in which practices generate conditions and conditions generate and support practices.

Hungarian dance scholar Csilla Könczei uses the mother tongue analogy to describe learning folk dances in their natural context:

“We acquire the mother tongue in the course of socialisation in informal ways, through imitation, without being aware of the fact that we are learning. In this case we don't need to know all the grammar rules, since these become part of our linguistic competency automatically, in a spontaneous way, and there is no need to become aware of these when speaking.”

(Könczei 2007, p135)

At all stages undertaking the study of ballet requires a conscious decision either on the part of the individual, or a parent or related adult on the pupil's behalf; and involves the

acceptance of apparently arbitrary rules and conventions and institutionalised study with a teacher in a dance studio or school. Yet its gradual absorption as a way of dancing through active participation in the community of practice and social culture of a ballet class over years, can also inculcate a subterranean layer of unacknowledged practices and attitudes in a way similar to the acquisition of a native language. Young learners in particular are generally engaged in a style of induction that encourages imitation without self-conscious analysis; this imposes what Bourdieu calls “practical belief” in the field, which is less a state of mind than “a state of the body”. The body does not possess objective separable knowledge, rather it relives through unconscious imitation.

This mode of absorption potentially not only inculcates technical, physical and social practices, but also generates a particular type of unconscious development of compositional skill within the form. In his analysis of bodily and practical learning Bourdieu, like Lilliestam, references Albert B. Lord's account of the training of Yugoslav epic bards, who acquire their practical mastery of compositional formulae by familiarization, repetition and absorption of the poems. Without “the sense of learning and subsequently manipulating this or that formula or any set of formulae” (Lord 1960 p34 cited in Bourdieu 1990 p74), the learner unconsciously internalizes rhythm and meter along with melody and meaning. In the same way ballet dancers not only learn to dance balletic material but to devise and give classwork, passing on their practical knowledge; the ability instantly to generate exercises and *enchaînements* is similarly acquired through “sheer familiarization” in the process of doing countless classes, rather than through “explicit and express transmission by precept and prescription” (ibid. p74-5).

Traditionally this unconscious learning is the means by which dancers have gradually morphed into ballet class teachers. At a basic level it inculcates an ability to assemble

and modify known balletic elements to form small dance compositions; perhaps a first step towards choreographic activity. Yet this improvisatory ability and practical mastery in using and combining balletic vocabulary does not necessarily imply conscious understanding of its significance, or the ability to verbally communicate intention and rational purpose, in order to create new dances of original character. Such “undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field” (ibid. p67) is inappropriate and insufficient not only for the teaching of older learners who may demand greater explanation and rational justification for what they are doing, but also for dancers who want to develop autonomous interpretative, creative or teaching abilities. For such the ballet class needs to be able to go beyond physical training and the necessary embedding of technical skills and schemas, to educate for understanding and the potential creatively to manipulate its body of knowledge. This may require developing consciousness of a naturally self-perpetuating ballet *habitus* that has been absorbed unconsciously from an early age. The design and delivery of the ballet class should facilitate learning opportunities that would enable the individual to break out and change a prevailing paradigm. The challenge lies in being able to do this without losing the evident practical benefits of an acquired embodied logic and the experience to deal with predictable but variable circumstances in an improvisatory way.

Seemingly mechanical practice can seem in opposition to logical thought, with division between automatic behaviours and consciously organized action. For Bourdieu scientific theory is outside time, synchronising what happens; by contrast practical action involves making decisions in the moment, anticipating the future, with urgency a defining characteristic of “playing the game”. Decisions are made “in conditions which exclude distance, perspective, detachment and reflexion.” (ibid. p82). For Bourdieu the logic of practice follows a principle of economy; action is organized by a few generative principles, which may sacrifice rigorous accuracy for approximation “for the sake of

simplicity and generality”, and which are coherent because they are “practical in the sense of convenient, that is, easy to master and use...” in the heat of the moment of action (ibid. p86). The “loose and approximate” systematicity of practice operates through analogy and metaphor, functioning below the level of explicit statement, in relation to practical purposes. Practices in time are irreversible sequences of largely unpredictable acts; this gives them an improvisatory character in which “the dialectic of strategy” replaces “the mechanics of the model” (ibid. p99). A small number of principles enables a diversity of possible responses within the limitations of the *habitus*. This combination of the systematic and the imprecise generates in action “a kind of stylistic unity, which though immediately perceptible, has none of the strict regular coherence of the concerted products of a plan.” (ibid. p102).

This model of action reflects practice within the ballet class, speaking as an analogy to the assimilation of technique by the individual. Central fundamental principles and concepts of ballet's technical theory are embedded in an infinite variety of combinations and interpretations, and dancers are required instantaneously to draw on their previous embodied knowledge to resolve dance challenges in the execution of new *enchaînements*. However “improvisatory”, “approximate” and “imprecise” are not words that would traditionally be ascribed to ballet technique classes, more normally seen as bastions of rigour and exactitude, imposing standards set both overtly and tacitly by an establishment of conservatoires, teaching organisations and professional companies. Official representations made through explicit statements of accepted norms which the *habitus* produces and recognizes contribute to the establishment's self-perpetuation; Bourdieu's description of this process of officialization can seem sharply pertinent to the institutionalisation of ballet training through its established training organizations, their structured courses and examination systems:

“Officialization is the process whereby the group (or those who dominate it) teaches itself and masks from itself its own truth, binds itself by a public profession which sanctions and imposes what it utters, tacitly defining the limits of the thinkable and the unthinkable and so contributing to the maintenance of

the social order from which it derives its power.”

(ibid. p108)

Bourdieu warns that the diffuse form of practical learning suffers as a consequence of the emergence of institutionalised education. Theoretical analysis makes possible conscious awareness of practical principles, which are then objectified through the formulation and conversion of shifting schemes into explicit norms and rules for pedagogic inculcation, thus departing from the flexible practical logic which generated them. In ballet these can be externally defined models rather than individually generated interpretations of shared principles. Bourdieu sees theoretical and practical approaches to learning as mutually incompatible, and suggests that mixing these in training cannot work, and leads to dysfunctional outcomes. He suggests that it is impossible for the actor to theorize about his or her practice; logic may reveal thought, but practice can only be described through specific examples and anecdote, the principles that guide it are invisible to the “learned ignorance” of the practitioner; whose main interest in any case is effective action rather than theoretical understanding:

“Caught up in 'the matter in hand', totally present in the present and in the practical functions that it finds there in the form of objective potentialities, practice excludes attention to itself (that is, to the past). It is unaware of the principles that govern it and the possibilities they contain; it can only discover them by enacting them, unfolding them in time.”

(ibid. p92)

This raises a dilemma for the researcher seeking to understand the logic of practice in the immediacy of dancing, and identify characteristics of the submerged *habitus* of the dancer, from individuals in whom these remain often unconscious and un verbalized. Bourdieu states that no anthropologist or observer external to the activity can expect to capture or convey the experience of practice, here the *habitus* of the dancer, through discourse (ibid. p68). Decrying the limitations of external academic observation, and claiming the apparent inability of practitioners to reflect, analyze and verbally express

their embodied knowledge, he calls the participant observer “a contradiction in terms” (ibid. p34). He himself admits that the very idea of a logic of practice is paradoxical. Bourdieu's fatalistic picture would seem to suggest that the currently fashionable notion of “the thinking dancer” is an impossibility, that the very act of thinking and reflection on practice endangers and corrupts the logic of practice that enables dancers to act in the moment, and access the highest level skills unthinkingly on demand. Many dancers have undergone a lengthy process of subconscious inculcation in ballet from a very early age, and, as has been described and suggested in Chapter 1, often have little encouragement or opportunity to discuss or experiment with what they do within the class. Evidence of repressive learning environments certainly fuels a wider perception that ballet dancers are unthinking executants, and through their disciplined training are mostly rendered incapable of creative activity.

However perspectives from other fields and disciplines on the functioning of tacit knowledge and the nature of reflection in and on professional practice can shed further light on the paradoxical nature of ballet's learning, building a more positive picture of how engrained instinctive practice and conscious intentional thinking might be combined in the acquisition of expertise, and culminate in its creative use.

3.6 Tacit knowledge and the reflective practitioner

The concept of tacit knowledge had been brought to the fore by philosopher of science Michael Polanyi in his lectures on the tacit dimension in 1966. Recognition of the fact that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1983 p4) drew him to consider and analyse the unspoken practical knowledges which form the basis for intellectual knowledge, and their root in our phenomenological and sensory experience of the world:

“Our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether

intellectual or practical.”

(Polanyi 1983 p15)

Polanyi proposes that we understand things not by looking at them but by internalizing them, “dwelling in them” (ibid. p18), and that true knowledge is shown by our ability to apply it in practice. Foreshadowing Bourdieu's claim of the disfunctionality of conscious rational approaches to the learning of complex embodied knowledges, Polanyi discusses the dangers of destroying a comprehensive if unconscious understanding through the excessive “specification of particulars” (ibid. p19). While he concedes that the conscious breakdown of physical skills which can temporarily disable the performer may subsequently help to improve performance, through the refinement of practice and judicious application of theoretical knowledge, he is clear that such explicit integration brings fundamental change to meaning, and that theoretical understanding cannot replace original tacit and embodied knowledge:

“The skill of a driver cannot be replaced by a thorough schooling in the theory of the motorcar; the knowledge I have of my own body differs altogether from the knowledge of its physiology; and the rules of rhyming and prosody do not tell me what a poem told me, without any knowledge of its rules... the process of formalizing all knowledge to the exclusion of any tacit knowing is self-defeating.”
(ibid. p20)

One might add that the practical ability to dance or make dances cannot be replaced by engagement with dance as a spectator or theorist.

This foreshadows Bourdieu's condemnation of the kind of institutionalized theoretical approaches to which the learning of ballet is increasingly subjected:

“Excellence (that is, practical mastery in its accomplished form) has ceased to exist once people start asking whether it can be taught, as soon as they seek to base 'correct' practice on rules extracted, for the purpose of transmission, as in all academicisms, from the practices of earlier periods or their products.”
(Bourdieu trans. Nice1990 p103)

Ballet's codification in set syllabi, conservatoire curricula and stratified examination systems can be seen to impose rules and accepted conceptions of what is “correct”, discouraging debate and individual interpretation as to alternative understandings

emerging from practice.

Bourdieu's bleak warning chimes with concerns outlined by Bengt Molander about the potential loss of the tacit knowledge of professional skills in Sweden from the 1970s, where an increasing emphasis on computerization, scientific knowledge, verbalization and theoretical transparency in tertiary education shifted educational policy ideologically from practice to applied theory. Referencing Polanyi Molander nevertheless outlines a broader conception of tacit knowledge which includes knowledge gained both by training and personal experience, transmitted through the observation and imitation of exemplary action as in the process of apprenticeship, but which also “consists of abilities to *make judgements* and to *do things* in practice, skilfully and with insight. The knowledge is *in* the judging and the doing.” (Molander 1992 p11, emphasis as in the original). Molander proposes a more proactive agent than the individual unconsciously shaped by Bourdieu's *habitus*, listing examples of ways to refer to instances of tacit knowledge which include

“understanding, skill, confidence, security in performance, mastery of an art, judgement, ability, talent, attentiveness, familiarity, experience, commitment...”
(ibid. p22)

Yet similarly to Bourdieu, Molander identifies the problem of explaining the nature of practical knowledge as in “the tension, or conflict, between *confidence in the exercise of knowledge* on the one hand and *critical knowledge formation* on the other.” (ibid. p 23). Like Bourdieu, Molander recognises the importance of time in the practical process; he sees knowledge, like communication, as ever moving, always with uncertainty and “unfinished” (ibid. p25), and the formation of knowledge as more fundamental than knowledge as a final state. The fact that ballet dancers continue to take class throughout their working life attests to a similar conception of their embodied knowledge as fluid, and its acquisition as perpetual and on-going, never to be ultimately achieved. Such a perception of knowledge as ever-changing conflicts with the institutional fixing of theoretical rules and external standards to which much ballet

training is now subject.

The problem area of “unarticulated and inarticulate knowledge” identified by Molander and Bourdieu raises the question of “how one could and should use various forms of *presentation, exposition, theory, instruction, and training* to learn, to maintain knowledge, and to teach” (Molander 1992 p10 emphasis as in the original).

Molander's analysis suggests that there are in fact ways to bring together conscious and unconscious learning in developing high levels of expertise. He draws from different strains of philosophical thought for other perspectives on where knowledge is situated, inclining toward a pragmatic perspective focused in human action with reference to John Dewey, Wittgenstein, Charles S. Peirce, William James, and most recently Donald Schön, whose ideas of “knowing-in action” and “reflection-in-action” are of particular relevance to the training of practitioners across a variety of fields (Schön 1987).

Molander's analysis of Schön's thinking begins by clarifying three uses and understandings of the concept of reflection from the 17th century onwards. In philosophy this reads as the mind having “knowledge of itself and its operations” (OED online cited by Molander 2008 p5); in more general usage as the capacity to look back and consider a subject; and Molander distinguishes a more specific notion of reflection in professional practice, here defined in the context of nursing:

“... the careful consideration of personal actions, including the ability to review, analyse, and evaluate situations during or after events.”
(Dictionary of Nursing 2003 cited by Molander 2008 p5)

This draws on John Dewey's comprehensive description of what he calls reflective experiences, which implies a dialectic between doing and experiencing. Learning from our experience is a process of “experiment with the world to find out what it is like” (Dewey 1916 cited in Molander 2008 p6). Schön expands our understanding of reflection through his detailed qualifications of different aspects of it, as it manifests in

practice as reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action. The notion of reflection happening in action has been contested on the grounds that there is little time for thinking in the immediacy of acting. However, Schön's examples of reflective practice observed in the fields of architecture and musical training in the conservatoire build a nuanced picture of the preparedness and ability of practitioners to draw on their experiential knowledge in the moment to deal with emergent and unforeseen situations. For Schön, like Gilbert Ryle (Ryle 1949 Chapter 2), thinking and acting are not separate but entwined in the ever-shifting on-going process of "intelligent practice":

"... it is this on-line anticipation and adjustment, this continuous detection and correction of error, that leads us in the first place to call activity "intelligent". *Knowing* suggests the dynamic quality of knowing-in-action, which, when we describe it, we convert to *knowledge* in action."
(Schön 1987, p49, emphasis as in the original)

Molander clarifies the subtle distinction between knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action in the latter's ability "to reshape our thinking and our action *while we are acting*" (Molander 2008 p10, emphasis as in the original), citing Schön's examples taken from sports. Action becomes a process of experiment and a continuous learning from the experience of doing; as Molander sums it up, the skilled and reflective practitioner is "the *attentive and learning* practitioner" (ibid. p11, emphasis as in the original). This is exemplified by the dancer who continues through their working life to practise the ballet class as a process of on-going search for greater expertise, refinement and understanding in dancing. Drawing on the thinking of aesthetician Paul Crowther, Rachel Duerden sees such activity of close scrutiny and revelation as essentially part of the work of the creative artist, and in particular the choreographer:

"The creative artist's view of the world is significant because it draws attention to certain things, allows us to recognise and appreciate qualities that may otherwise have passed us by, as Paul Crowther observes. A choreographer in responding to music, does this twofold, arguably: first 'drawing attention' through the creation of dance movement itself and, secondly, 'drawing attention' through the relationship of dance and music."
(Duerden 2007 p81)

Molander also draws attention to the dialogic nature of reflection, which he contends

cannot be understood as the subject's observation of a phenomenon as object, but is rather the outcome of a conversation; between the experienced practitioner and the novice, between the practitioner and colleagues, and between the practitioner and the material. Molander describes how Schön uses the example of sketching in the design studio to demonstrate that knowledge and insight are not pre-determined but emerge from the practitioner's attempts to communicate the experience through a symbolic medium:

“That the sketching and design situation is *reflective* means that the designer does not know what she has done or what she is striving for until what she has been doing has responded. It *shows* her what she has done and what she has been striving for... the context of action has to be seen as a context of meaning that is not fully determined in advance.”

(Molander 2008 p19)

Learning in the ballet class requires a similar reflective process. Significantly for this research Molander reminds us that the intentional thinking that Dewey equates with reflection is not necessarily “mental” or rational, but emerges from wider sensory experience. The student “sketches” the dance material set as a task, then considers aspects of the effectiveness of his/her performance (for example technical, expressive, in meeting the specifications given, how it felt, or in response to teacher feedback) of what he/she has done. In this “conversation” the dance material reflects back to the student a more detailed sensory conception; and the student may amend their practice in response to these insights. Interaction between the teacher’s verbal instruction and responsive feedback, and the learner’s evolving danced interpretation, can construct an increasingly refined knowledge about the nature and performance of an *enchaînement*. Externalised reflection in the dance studio may be literally provided by a mirror; where there is no mirror, reflection may be construed as a metaphor for the exchange of views in the dialogues that Schön has identified. This does not necessarily achieve an ultimate defined truth; but forms part of a never-ending development of knowledge and refinement of action. Here we might recognise Spatz’ conception of

practice as the on-going research process which feeds the on-going development of the transmissible knowledge that is technique. Externally defined “correctness” in this context might therefore be construed as “conventional” according to a particular stylistic conception, and thus be open to question.

As Molander points out, changes in practice may not happen immediately and discernibly, and the knowing may take a while to be absorbed, with further experiment and dialogue needed. As a teacher I am frequently reminded that evidence of learning and progress may only emerge unexpectedly months after the original process of exploration began. Molander concludes with an animadversion on the need for space and time to accommodate the particular rhythm of reflective practice, knowing both when to experience the immediacy of reflection in action, when to reflect after action, and when to allow learning to settle and be absorbed:

“...practices that do not allow space and time for reflection will probably end up as non-learning practices.”
(ibid. p21)

In such reflective processes we might see an intelligent practice at work that would develop the capacity of the dancer to question the unthinking responses provided by the habitus and to deal with the emergent and unknown; paving the way for creativity both in interpretation and in the making of original and unconventional dances. Preparing the dancer to do this constitutes an education, yet facilitated and arrived at through the medium and processes of training. This calls for closer questioning of how these training processes of intelligent practice function in the development of expertise.

3.7 Developing savoir-faire and expertise through deliberate practice

Bourdieu's explanation of unconscious socialisation through the acquiring of know-how

via repeated practice does not completely account for the voluntary acquisition of embodied know-how that allows for the development of specialist skills in the arts and sports, in particular highly codified forms such as ballet. Sylvia Faure distinguishes “savoir-faire” - know-how – from the more general disposition of the habitus by the former's specialisation as a particular skill, whether practical, intellectual, moral or affective; using Bruner's definition of it as a competence, what a person knows how to do (Bruner cited in Faure 2000, p100). Know-how might also encompass Spatz' concept of technique as transmissible knowledge.

“How did Bourdieu learn to play tennis?” ask Greg Noble and Megan Watkins in their discussion paper on the development of skilful practice (Noble & Watkins, 2003). They suggest that athletes building their skills are engaged in an embodied practice which includes both conscious and unconscious activity, and a range of differing levels of awareness, from automaticity through attentiveness in the moment to personal reflection. Examples from a range of other areas of activity in which voluntary repetition of skills is undertaken to embed them in the body would seem to support this description. Loïc Wacquant writes evocatively of the monotonous and repetitious workouts of boxers, essential for slow absorption of both the physical and the mental schemata necessary to develop the bodily sensitivity and instincts of the fighter, the construction of a boxer's habitus. This cannot be achieved rationally but must be practised; taking years, as does the similarly automatized technical mastery of professional musicians and dancers (Wacquant 1995, p72).

However ethnographic accounts of the repetition of such training routines suggests not just doing the same thing endlessly, but more a process of what Wacquant calls “finely regulated manipulation” (Wacquant 1995, p73) whereby constant micro calibrations and adjustments refine the repeated action. Noble and Watkins prefer to talk of “habituation” whereby skills become naturalized; ethnographer Jean Lave in discussion

of her observation of tailors in Liberia talks about apprentices learning to make trousers through a process of “practice by successive approximation” (Lave 2011, p86). This resonates for the ballet dancer as the constant reiteration of movements and phrases in repeated classes in search of greater refinement and concentration of action; what Cadopi and Bonnery refer to as the second phase of integration in the learning process.

This process of improvement is considered in scientific detail by Karl Anders Ericsson in his long established research into the development of expertise. In “Enhancing the Development of Professional Performance” (Ericsson 2010), he examines the phenomena of trainability and deliberate practice. He challenges the traditional view that expert achievement is mainly dependent on innate gifts such as talent, and mental and physical aptitudes – a view still held in some ballet circles - proposing that skilled and expert performance is trainable. His interest lies in elucidating why it is that some become more expert than others:

“Only by accurately measuring the detailed structure of the increased professional performance are we likely to be able to assess the differences among those professionals who keep improving their performance and those who stagnate in their professional development shortly after the start of their professional careers.”

(Ericsson 2010 p406)

It is widely accepted that the highest levels of performance require “...many thousands of hours of specific types of practice and training... extended engagement in domain related activities in the corresponding domain” (ibid. p411). This view is endorsed by the experienced ballet teachers interviewed by Dean Speer (Speer 2010). From their practical perspective all recognise that ballet is taught and learned slowly and painstakingly over a long time. Francia Russell describes acquiring ballet technique as an “endless work in progress” which can “only be understood gradually” (Russell, Speer 2010 p121), by what Roni Mahler calls “a process of osmosis” (Mahler, Speer 2010 p92).

However Ericsson's survey of research leads to the conclusion that length of experience alone does not necessarily generate improvement. He notes how in acquiring everyday skills and activities, once an acceptable level of performance has been reached behaviours become automated to minimize the effort required to maintain a stable level of competence (Ericsson 2010 p417). Through a conscious process of repetition and refinement skills gradually return to the unconscious, becoming a habitus; and achievement plateaus.

A level of automaticity has real value to the advanced practitioner, leaving space and attention for focus on not just the action but its wider purpose; in sport the strategy of the game, in tailoring the making of a well fitted garment, in dance perhaps artistic expression, interpretation and even creation. Too much conscious effort on the mechanics can impede performance, as one of Faure's interviewees observed (Faure 2000, p117). But Ericsson describes how those performers who wish to go beyond their current maximal performance delay the development of complete automaticity through a process of deliberate practice, which continually increases the challenge and complexity of their actions and understanding, requiring constant conscious effort. They identify aspects of their performance which can be improved, taking on specific training activities to develop the desired skills, that are outside "their current realm of reliable performance" but designed to be mastered within a limited time frame so as to avoid discouragement. Such individuals do not continue undertaking activities simply in pursuit of enjoyment and self actualisation, but are motivated to improve through constant conscious effort, they

"...continue to seek out, with the help of their teachers, new training activities where they need to engage in problem solving to alter their cognitive representations that allow them to keep improving the mechanisms mediating performance..."

(Ericsson 2010 p417)

The challenge can be not necessarily doing something more difficult, but doing the same thing better; more deeply, accurately, in more detail, with greater concentration.

This process can continue indefinitely, and is essential not only to the development of expert performance in the young and aspiring, but arguably to the longevity of practitioners; the continuance of deliberate practice not only maintains high-level skills but can potentially stave off age-related decline (ibid. p420). Ericsson draws examples of deliberate practice from the fields of chess, sport, medicine and music; but similar learning strategies could be seen to apply to developing skills in dance. The ballet class is a place where deliberate practice can be modelled, providing opportunities for the motivated dancer at all levels of experience to develop intensity of physiological and psychological engagement, concentration and effort; vital not only for the dancer seeking professional employment, but also for any learner aspiring to develop greater mastery of and insight into a sophisticated and challenging medium.

3.8 The relationship of expertise and creativity

Such strategies as deliberate practice can be seen as integral to the development of the dancer as skilful and nuanced interpreter; but further explanation is needed of the relationship of expertise to creativity.

In her study *Apprendre par corps* (Faure, 2000) sociologist Sylvia Faure examined and compared modes of learning in ballet and contemporary classes in a municipal state supported conservatoire as well as in private studios, undertaking a programme of observations and interviews with young dancers at different stages in their learning (from beginners to emerging professionals), and with their teachers. Important to note that in this French context none of these regional schools follow the set syllabi of independent teaching organizations as might equivalent schools in the UK; although the publicly supported conservatoire comes under national regulation, following directives from the Ministry of Culture.

Despite the school structures and levels within which the dancers in her study were taught, Faure identifies the dance learning model essentially as a type of apprenticeship, distinguishing within that two forms, one following a logic of “discipline”, the other a logic of “singularity” (Faure 2000, pp114-119). She defines the logic of discipline as involving the incorporation of the body technique of a specific tradition by following an ideal model. Much ballet training provides a powerful example of this approach, but other codified dance techniques could also seem to be working in this way; for example the Indian classical forms of Kathak and Bharatanatyam, and in contemporary dance to some extent Graham and Cunningham techniques. Acquiring significant complex skills involves the learner in analytical processes for the correction and perfection of movement. Crucially in this model the acquisition of technical skill is seen as a necessary precursor to the development of artistic abilities; the artist is a technician before becoming an interpreter and later possibly a creator.

Faure sees a connection in the logic of discipline with Foucault's “docile bodies”; the body as a rationally controllable mechanism, the pupil shaping it under the surveillance of the teacher through practice, analysis and self-regulation to be usable for the choreographer. A logic of discipline can bring comforting certainty and a sense of measurable progression towards defined technical achievements. But training for an externally imposed conception of technical accomplishment in class potentially shapes the future role of the emerging dancer in a relationship where the choreographer is an artist, and the dancer an instrument or material with little autonomy or creative agency. A logic of discipline geared to mastery of the traditional *danse d'école* and shared language of the ballet class is therefore, as Salosaari might contend (Salosaari 2001), potentially in conflict with the development of the dancer as artist.

However some thinking within the study of expertise suggests that Faure's logic of discipline need not be as stifling of individual artistic expression as it might appear. Robert Weisberg presents two conflicting perspectives on the role of expertise in the development of creative thinking (Weisberg 2018). What he designates the "remote associates" view has deep roots and connections with Gestalt psychology; it holds that creativity requires "thinking out of the box", coming about through the linking of previously unconnected ideas. Creative imagination is portrayed as unstructured, not using existing connections in the memory, but letting go of control of thought processes through "cognitive disinhibition" to enable flashes of insight. In a constantly changing world a broad attentional focus allows access to a wider range of less closely associated ideas, and existing expertise is rejected in the restructuring of problematic situations.

The contrasted "expertise and structured imagination" view also acknowledges the need for adaptation to a constantly changing environment; but the assumption is that change is slow and gradual, and that it is therefore reasonable to start trying to solve new problems by transferring existing expertise:

"... if the present were not amenable to analysis based on the past, it is hard to understand why humans evolved the capacity to remember it."
(Weisberg 2018 p820)

Weisberg's analysis of a selection of case studies of radical creative breakthroughs drawn from science, architecture and the visual arts suggests that the creative imagination is structured, making connections with "near associates" to progress through building on the known, step by step rather than leaping. This process requires long periods of preparation; Weisberg cites Hayes' "ten year rule" and the "idea that creative production depended on long-term immersion in a domain, which provides the opportunity for the acquisition of expertise" (ibid. p820). He proposes that in understanding creative thinking and action the pervasive truism of "*thinking outside of the box*" needs to be challenged, and arguably replaced by encouraging "*reiterative*

thinking inside the box" (ibid. p832, emphasis as in the original).

One might see attempts to broaden and rejuvenate ballet's repertoire by the commissioning of choreographers from other dance genres as based in the remote associates conception of creative thinking that Weisberg questions. By contrast the ballet class with its capacity for shifting, responsive and often improvised content starting from known material would seem to accord with the model of expertise and structured imagination. It can potentially allow for development of creative thinking abilities by framing familiar vocabulary in new contexts, challenging dancers through the exercise of transferring their knowledge to different situations, opening the door to more radical use of its wealth of material and ways to assimilate the new. The question for this research is to ascertain to what extent today's ballet classes provide space for this gradual development of capacities for creative thinking and behaviour, and what form practical and pedagogic strategies to cultivate these might take.

In contrast to the logic of discipline is what Faure calls the logic of singularity, an approach to dance learning that she identifies from her observation of different contemporary dance classes. In such classes teaching practices demonstrate a valuing of the individual dancer at all stages in their learning, whether beginner or expert. Faure acknowledges that as with the logic of discipline there is here a process of acquisition of action schemas and skills which become more routine through repetition; but at the same time there is development of dispositions to adapt, improvise, reflect and be aware of others. New elements are introduced and established material changed, with a view to discouraging automatic and mechanical responses, and to encourage the dancer's ability to adapt. The teacher demonstrates and explains, there is imitation and correction as Cadopi and Bonnery describe; but there are also experiments, and tasks which do not provide a model solution as in those exercises shown and taught (Faure, 2000 p118). An approach of singularity can

allow for the personal setting of goals and building of individual confidence in the dancer's knowledge and emerging skills. In such classes technique is at the service of the dancer who is treated as a potential artist and creator, not merely a technician and performer of the artistic creations of others. A focus of my field research has therefore been to identify whether some of these more open strategies, which allow of individual investigation and decision making, may already to be found in ballet classes, and to look for opportunities and ways in which it may be possible to incorporate them.

This chapter has examined in detail the mechanisms of embodied learning that underlie the ballet class and promote the development of the expertise that its practitioners require. This has largely been looked at from the perspective of the individual's personal practice in relationship with the teacher; but learning experiences can also be significantly shaped and affected by wider social configurations and pressures. The next chapter continues theoretical analysis of ballet's learning by looking at the social contexts of ballet's embodied learning in class.

Chapter 4: The social contexts of embodied learning

Having looked at the processes whereby the individual acquires knowledge and expertise in embodied practices, I now look at aspects of the wider social settings in which ballet is studied. Ballet classes today are predominantly group learning activities as distinct from one-to-one situations; yet the oral and embodied transmission of knowledge in artistic traditions and the development of embodied expertise has more traditionally followed the model of apprenticeship.

4.1 The communal class

As a social structure closer to the model of the classroom for academic study, the communal ballet class can be seen to have both advantages and drawbacks for the processes of embodied learning, which more commonly take place in a different type of learning context. Conservatoire musicians or aspirant tennis aces are usually developing their deliberate practice either through independent study, or in one-to-one coaching sessions; where it is possible to receive the immediate targeted feedback and opportunities for repetition of tasks to incorporate modifications under supervision, which Ericsson considers essential contributors to the effectiveness of deliberate practice (Ericsson 2010). In large group ballet classes it may be impossible to receive the personally focused attention of the teacher or be set individually tailored tasks. Outside conservatoire settings there are often few opportunities for individual personal practice because of limited time and space for dancing; communal class is the most economic means of access to the dance studio. It enables dancers not only to learn from an experienced teacher but also from observation of and exchange with fellow students, widely recognised as a process of educational value. But with most technical

practice having to take place within the context of a shared class, dancers have fewer opportunities to develop the self-sufficient habits of private personal practice and study that musicians are encouraged to cultivate, thereby to develop the capacity to work alone productively. The communal class teacher sets the practice agenda, and the dancer has little personal agency over what is studied, and may become dependent on external instruction.

In this situation, given the powerful enhancement of expertise that deliberate practice can bring about, and the potential loss of those skills that are not accorded the attention of deliberate practice, the teacher's choice of class content becomes crucially important. Ericsson makes connection between the deliberate practice of the individual in vocational technical study with wider artistic and cultural developments, citing as an example the historic development of increasingly complex piano playing technique, driven by the demands of composers and the changing technology of the instrument (ibid. p416). Through a similar two-way relationship the selection and prioritisation of material in class as the primary site for the development of dancers' technical capacities in ballet can be seen to have significant interaction not only with the performance of repertoire, but also with choreographic activity and the future development of ballet as a form of dance. Examples of these relationships will be examined in Chapters 7 and 8.

4.2 Apprenticeship and situated learning

Alternative to the communal lesson led by a teacher is the educational model of apprenticeship, "the ancient system of vocational development" (Smith D. 1992 p77), whereby a novice is taken under the wing of a master who instructs and inducts him/her into the specialist knowledge and skills of a particular craft or vocation through a situation of engagement in the actual practice. As Donald Schön describes it,

“When someone learns a practice, he is initiated into the traditions of a community of practitioners and the practice world they inhabit. He learns their conventions, constraints, languages, and appreciative systems, their repertoire of exemplars, systematic knowledge and patterns of knowing-in-action.... Apprenticeship offers direct exposure to real conditions of practice and patterns of work.”

(Schön 1987, pp36-37)

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger provide five studies of apprenticeship in a range of international contexts (midwives in Mexico, tailors in Liberia, butchers, navy quartermasters and members of Alcoholics Anonymous in the US) to explore and illuminate the theory behind this form of situated learning through accompaniment (Lave & Wenger 1991), often dismissively described as “sitting with Nelly” (Smith D. 1992 p78). In their examples Lave and Wenger follow the process of learning beginning with the simplest activities, through involvement with increasingly complex tasks and skills, until the apprentice has developed into an autonomous practitioner. The learner progresses from basic repetitive tasks through to activities requiring accumulated experiential knowledge as well as high order thinking skills such as structural understanding, strategic planning, and creative design. Thus almost paradoxically the novice tailor will move chronologically backward through the garment making process, beginning with simple finishing skills such as hemming or sewing on a button, arriving ultimately at sophisticated creative skills of pattern cutting and design (Lave & Wenger 1991 p72). Lave and Wenger identify this process as “legitimate peripheral participation”; from the beginning the learner is involved in the actual making or doing as a legitimate practitioner, moving gradually from the periphery of a community of practice to its centre as an expert and potential educator for the next generation.

An example persisting in the arts of the potency of this method of learning by gradual induction into an expert community can be seen in cathedral choirs, combining the voices of both men and boys in music making which can be at the highest level. I witnessed this myself over the years during which my son was a chorister at Christ

Church Cathedral in Oxford (1999-2004). From the age of 7 or 8 years, boy singers are gradually drawn into full membership of the choral ensemble; starting by simply joining in attendance at services and unison singing of communal hymns; through progressive absorption into psalmody and more complex liturgical and musical forms requiring understanding of harmony, part singing and score reading; ultimately potentially undertaking professional soloist responsibilities in highly sophisticated music. This takes place over a period of approximately five years until the voice breaks and changes, although advanced musical skills and knowledge remain. "Training" is accomplished through singing alongside adult male expert singers and musicians in rehearsals and the regular public performance contexts of services, with occasional concerts and for some recordings. At no point in this musical education do the boys undertake formalised scholastic examination of their learning; instead their graduated participation in the scheduled activities of the choir combines both learning and assessment in a constant progression.

The Danish dancer Erik Bruhn described his training to become a dancer from the age of 9 years at the Royal Danish Ballet School 1937-1947 in terms that suggest that the model was not dissimilar. Children danced and performed alongside adults from an early stage; the training consisted largely of the study of the Bournonville choreography which formed the "centre and very base" of its repertoire:

"There were many opportunities for us children to appear on the stage. To be chosen as one of the eight children to dance in Konservatoriet was the goal of all of us. Since the same dance combinations were given in our daily classes, we all strove to perfect ourselves in the steps, so that one day we might be given the opportunity to perform them."

(Bruhn in Bruhn & Moore 2005, p12)

This can be seen as an example of legitimate peripheral participation, and of the gradual absorption of young dancers into the company's community of professional practice. Training through the daily class also involved the sharing of material across all levels of seniority and experience, so that young dancers would have direct access

in the studio not only to the choreographic repertoire and its dance material, but to exemplars of its performance by experienced practitioners:

“During these ten years, I was trained in the Bournonville school. There were six different classes, for the different days of the week. They were 'set' and were repeated with hardly a change from the day you entered the school as a child, until you graduated, and continued on as a professional dancer. At that time the children received the same strenuous training as the adults. Everyone, whether a beginner or a member of the company, was given the same exercises.”

(ibid. p12)

Aspects of this mode of learning, although particularly relevant for the transmission of embodied skills, can also be recognised more widely in professions such as law and architecture, and in the development of junior university researchers into experts and senior academics through their gradual absorption into research communities in particular areas of knowledge, acquiring as they go greater depth of subject knowledge and argumentation skills.

Yet in his overview of its history David Smith described how formalised apprenticeship in Europe originating in the mediaeval guilds has more recently been denigrated as “a dangerous anachronism” as a consequence of the rise of organised training and the professional trainer (Smith D. 1992 p78). Within ballet Bruhn and Moore voice related concerns about the apparently ossified Bournonville training:

“It is quite possible that many youngsters were irreparably harmed by the old practice of putting small beginners in the same class with advanced students, and expecting the youngsters to learn just by imitation.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005, p55)

4.3 The systematization of ballet training

Worries as to the appropriateness of certain practices to inexperienced learners, such as those expressed by Bruhn and Moore, contributed to the British drive to standardise

training and qualify teachers in the early 20th century. In the absence of state supported conservatoires such as those in Russia, Paris and Copenhagen, much dance learning in the UK would have followed an informal studio model, whereby dancers would seek out a particular teacher (often a performer) to study with, either in group classes or via one-to-one private tuition. Thus in 1914 the 16 year old de Valois, already an experienced performer but needing to develop and consolidate her ballet technique, began twice weekly private lessons with the respected ballet master Edouard Espinosa (Sorley Walker 1998, p9). It could be argued that, since the first establishment of teaching organisations offering set syllabi and a progression of standardised examinations, ballet training in Britain has almost entirely shifted to the regulated delivery of classes in structured school settings with trained teachers who may or may not have professional performing experience.

Much early training for ballet is now accomplished through preparation for the graded examinations of extensive teaching organisations such as the Royal Academy of Dance, the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing and the British Ballet Organization. Increasingly these organisations and ballet's vocational training establishments are required to map the progression of dance learning and the qualifications they offer against national progression routes and levels of attainment developed for learning in academic subjects offered in the formalised settings of schools, colleges and universities. However the appropriateness of such structuring to embodied learning can be critiqued, as has already been suggested with reference to Bourdieu's scepticism (see Chapter 3.5). Jean Lave's reflections on modes of learning, arising from both her research into apprenticeship in Liberia, and through this her own experience of learning to be an ethnographer, also raise fundamental questions about the widespread acceptance in Western cultures of such formalised scholastic approaches as a necessarily superior educational model (Lave, 2011).

What may be the influence of such systematization on the way ballet is transmitted and learned in the ballet class? A characteristic of apprenticeship is learning alongside others who are at different stages in their development. With finely differentiated and controlled levels of examination progression set by the stratified systems of the teaching organisations, much ballet learning is now accomplished in narrowly defined groups, alongside dancers of a comparable level of experience and achievement, with specified material of a particular level of simplicity or complexity. The onus in such a situation is on the teacher as sole source of a more advanced or expert level of practice, knowledge and experience.

Despite their concerns about mixed level classes, Lilian Moore and Erik Bruhn also sounded a warning note about the effects of the systematization of Bournonville's teaching after his death into the six classes for the different days of the week:

“The establishment of this formula had results which were both good and bad. It preserved, intact, some aspects of ballet technique which were very much worth saving, and which have vanished in the rest of the world. It also kept the dancers in good practice for the special requirements of the Bournonville repertoire, and so helped to save his masterpieces. However, it had the harmful effect of making it possible for anyone who had memorized the order of the classes to teach the 'Bournonville system'. Any exercise is good only in the hands of one who knows how and when to use it.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005, p23)

They stressed the need for teachers to have wider experience and the ability to select and modify material to suit the needs of the dancers in the class:

“Any teaching method which becomes arbitrary and dogmatic will inevitably degenerate, because it can be taught by rote. The teacher who has been exposed to many influences, in his study and practice of dancing, and who has remained open-minded and flexible, will be able to select the proper exercises at the proper time, if he gives careful thought to each young dancer in his care.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005, p24)

Here it is the teacher rather than an externally defined syllabus who exercises autonomous professional judgement in deciding both the “proper”, in the sense of appropriate, content and the “proper” time for introducing it. This leads Bruhn and Moore to posit that “the teacher can also be an artist” (ibid. p63). This suggests by

extension that the effective teacher needs to have greater experience and opportunity for artistry in decision-making than conforming to a prescribed syllabus and curriculum might allow.

The division of learners into stratified groups of a specific level of knowledge and skills implies assumptions about the nature of effective dance learning. Content is here tightly framed by the teacher and an overtly designed syllabus as the accepted sources of knowledge. Such classes can enable useful specific technical analysis, and assistance with individual problem solving, avoiding the potential dangers of young learners attempting to copy overly ambitious material from the advanced practitioners they dance beside that Bruhn and Moore were concerned about. But the valuable hidden curriculum of informal learning by unconscious absorption, observation and experience of different levels of expertise within a shared communal practice, which Schön, Lave and others identify, is cut out.

Such learning alongside more experienced practitioners continues as the student dancer gradually joins the professional community. Reviewing my own vocational education as a young dancer I now recognise the value of the opportunity to learn in the shared premises of the Royal Ballet Senior School, then in Baron's Court, where the dancers of the Royal Ballet companies could be glimpsed rehearsing and doing class in adjacent studios, providing models of professional behaviour, technical standards, stylistic inflection and performative interpretations. On joining the Royal Ballet my informal learning as a dance performer and ultimately choreographer continued, not just alongside more experienced practitioners in rehearsals and company classes, but in sharing the stage as a junior participant with dancers of the highest standards who intrigued me and compelled my admiration in their embodiment of powerful choreographic works. I formed opinions and made artistic evaluations, and explored the characteristic movement of dancers I particularly admired either through

imitation of specific phrases and fragments, or attempts at a wider evocation of their manners and style of moving. Looking back on this phase of my life I see it as an education via apprenticeship, which, through its haphazard exploration of ways to translate what I saw into my own danced action, helped to develop a capacity for autonomous learning.

In systematized courses the real activities of involvement in professional practice which are such a feature of learning via apprenticeship are potentially replaced by what Bransford and Schwartz call “weak proxies”, measures of learning which do not adequately model the performance abilities that will be needed by the developing expert (Bransford & Schwartz 2010 p437). To counter this and maximise the professional authenticity of the learning experience, the final year student companies of vocational courses involve experienced professionals as teachers and choreographers, and book performance tours. This format claims to simulate as closely as possible the immersive working alongside experienced performers that apprenticeship in an established professional company would provide; however within classes and in performance the student group is still all of a similar level of attainment.

I return to Donald Schön’s thinking for an alternative model that endeavours to combine a structured learning environment with authentic tasks and experiences.

4.3 The practicum

Schön recognises the potentially negative pressures of real life work situations and environments not formally set up to manage a long-term educational process of apprenticeship. He proposes and describes an alternative “virtual” environment designed for the learning of practices, the practicum, which approximates the real world of practice, and where students learn by doing. Within the practicum the learner develops an appreciation of competent practice and learns how to achieve it through

practical action, "...its tools, methods, projects and possibilities"; Schön suggests that this is accomplished "through some combination of the student's learning by doing, her interactions with coaches and fellow students, and a more diffuse process of "background learning" " (Schön 1987, p38). His description of the role of experienced practitioners as coaches in facilitating student activity and learning in the practicum provides a template for the role of the teacher in the ballet class:

"Students practice in a double sense. In simulated, partial, or protected form, they engage in the practice they wish to learn. But they also practice, as one practices the piano, the analogues in their field of the pianist's scales and arpeggios. They do these things under the guidance of a senior practitioner... From time to time these individuals may teach in the conventional sense, communicating information, advocating theories, describing examples of practice. Mainly, however, they function as coaches whose main activities are demonstrating, advising, questioning, and criticizing."

(ibid. p38)

Schön sees the learning in a practicum as operating on three levels. Initially training offers the accumulation of technical knowledge and rules and their application in standard situations; but also the acquisition of ways of thinking and behaviour that enable practitioners to convert their general knowledge for specific use - potentially in the ballet class the ability to recombine known elements in new *enchaînements* – thus modeling professional behaviour, what Schön terms after Hannah Arendt "thinking like a -" (ibid. p39). Ultimately the student's full learning should enable the ability to deal with new situations which go beyond existing professional knowledge; cultivating reflection-in-action to be able to develop new solutions and new rules. The first two stages can be seen as a crucial ground for the development of the creativity of the third stage:

"Perhaps we learn to reflect-in-action by learning first to recognize and apply standard rules, facts and operations; then to reason from general rules to problematic cases, in ways characteristic of the profession; and only then to develop and test new forms of understanding and action where familiar categories and ways of thinking fail."

(ibid. p40)

Schön sees this ultimate level of practicum in what he calls the "deviant traditions of

education for practice” (ibid. p15) of studio and conservatory, later analysing in detail examples from music and architecture. Here students undertake projects which may ultimately end in public performance – in music the preparation of an interpretation of repertoire for recital, in architecture a design in response to a commission. As in Faure's logic of discipline and Weisberg's view of creativity through expertise and structured imagination, the absorption of existing technical knowledge and skills to enable standard requirements is seen as a necessary precursor to the ability to use knowledge creatively.

The technique class can be just one part of a wider programme of learning which might more appropriately be regarded as a practicum; such as the performing companies of vocational schools, where final year students demonstrate their acquired abilities in the real context of public performance of new and established repertoire. In such cases the focus of a class may indeed be more narrowly aimed at the mastery of specific skills and physical preparation, in the expectation that creative use of dancers' capacities is being fostered in other activities. But few aspiring dancers have access to such substantial and institutionally supported opportunities, which are likely to come only at the end of the dancer's education and training. If an inflexible unthinking habitus is not to be formed, the creative attitudes which will be required, not just of the future choreographer but also of the engaged and contributing practitioner, and potentially the informed audience member, must have opportunities to take root and be nurtured from the start and over time in the ubiquitous ballet technique class.

The ballet class could thus be envisaged as a dance practicum in itself, potentially at all levels providing an environment for learning modeled on and developing professional practice. To provide this, the teacher cannot simply deliver a pre-planned curriculum, but needs to take on the wider educative roles of the practising artist that Schön has identified as a necessary part of the practicum. It remains to be seen to

what extent today's classes in themselves potentially contribute to the development of creative ability which is the intended final outcome of a professional practicum; and whether such classes can indeed encompass the full range of ballet's educational experiences.

4.5 To summarize Chapters 3 and 4

By building a theoretical picture of the class as a particular pedagogic phenomenon, these chapters address the first of my research questions as to the transmission of ballet's knowledge. Understanding how the ballet class operates starts from acknowledgement of its nature as a form of practical learning in which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next through personal transmission; similar to models from other oral traditions and professional education. Drawing on clarification of the distinction between training and education Chapter 3 has proposed that the ballet class is a learning experience of greater depth, complexity and conscious individual agency than a "drill and skill" training; potentially meeting the criteria laid down by McFee in his account of the characteristics of an education (McFee 2004 p29). While ballet teachers seem to agree that the class must contribute to the development of both technique and artistry, there are nevertheless conflicted understandings of these concepts and how they relate. Tracing evolving ideas of the scope of technique as transferable knowledge I conclude that artistry and technique should be combined in the embodied learning of ballet.

Consideration of the mechanisms of such learning has shown that it can include both the unconscious - the absorption and reiteration that generate and sustain Bourdieu's powerful habitus, and the vast reserves of untapped tacit knowledge – but also the conscious acquisition of savoir-faire, as in the willed and discriminating efforts of

reflective and deliberate practice. Research on expertise suggests that the nurturing of creativity in ballet dancers is potentially able to arise from this long-term development of understanding and expertise, rather than being stifled by it.

However Chapter 4 has begun to show how the social contexts in which ballet's learning happens can affect what is taught and prioritised. It draws attention to the possible impacts, both beneficial and problematic, of social environments and structures on ballet's processes of learning; contrasting apprenticeship, and gradual acceptance within a community of professional practice or via a reflective practicum, with formal and systematized training available through ballet's established institutions, conservatoires and teaching organisations.

To solve what he has outlined as the problem of how to educate for artistry in wider professional education, Schön advocates the careful study of "the performance of unusually competent performers" (Schön 1987 p13); his book not only examining cases of unusual artistry but also the circumstances and situations in which it is acquired. This guidance informs my investigation of current ballet class practice and the extent of the significance of its artistic dimensions to teachers and class participants. Field research provides specific examples of how classes are shaped by their differing contexts; and helps to define the characteristics of learning environments which might contribute to the promotion of creative attitudes and approaches in the ballet class.

I now set out my own field research and its findings. My next chapter provides a detailed pilot analysis of a specific class; this first stage enabled the refinement of practical methods of observation and documentation, and the devising and selection of relevant interview questions for participating subjects. It also helped to refine and focus specific research themes to frame emerging discussion.

Chapter 5: A pilot observation and emerging questions for field research

I began my field research by looking at a recording of a class already in the public domain. The Royal Ballet was filmed in company class at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden for World Ballet Day on 4th October 2014, and this was subsequently posted on YouTube. I chose this class because there had been relatively few complete classes at this level available to view. Although in recent years World Ballet Day has opened the doors on elite ballet company practice, making more of such non-performance activity accessible to the public, classes are sometimes represented by just a part, rather than the whole sequence and build-up of content. Its availability for repeated re-examination made this class a useful pilot study; it also provided an example of the ballet class at the level of top professional practice. At the time of writing, this video has had over 3 million hits; thus the particular interpretation of the dancing material shown on this occasion is likely to have a larger impact on wider conceptions of the ballet as a way of dancing than any live ballet classes. For that reason alone this class merits very close scrutiny and critique of its content and delivery.

This complete company morning class prior to the day's rehearsals lasted one hour and fifteen minutes, taught by Brian Maloney (BM), a former principal dancer who retired from dancing in 2013 to move into company teaching. The class was accompanied live by Royal Ballet class and rehearsal pianist Paul Stobart (PS). For the purposes of World Ballet Day there were two commentators; TV presenter George Lamb with dancer Kristen McNally in the role of resident expert and mediator. Their dialogue forms an extended interview with occasional breaks, Lamb asking a layman's

questions as to what is happening, with explanation and commentary provided in response by McNally. But conversation also ranges outside of the immediate class content to focus on particular dancers and wider questions; about other ballet companies in the UK, the company's schedule and practices, what else will be available to view during the Royal Ballet's section of the day etc. For this reason although the cameras remain covering the event throughout, the coverage is sometimes selective in tune with topics discussed; for example, female dancers changing into pointe shoes after the barre work. At times the focus is more on close-ups of individuals as they await their turn, and less on the class material in execution and teaching; and at some points the teacher's instruction is inaudible and invisible. Despite this it does show the entirety of the class content in real time.

The class took place in the Clore Studio at the Royal Opera House. This large rectangular studio is intended to be used for more public events as well as rehearsals, with rows of banked seating down one long wall, and the option to curtain off the mirrors, which extend the full length of the opposite wall as well as down one of the side walls. On this occasion rather than using the seating as a frontal focus as in performance, the centre work part of the class faced towards the opposite mirrored wall. There are wall barres on all three sides, and for the first part of the class four additional lengths of portable barre in the centre of the space enabled the accommodation of approximately fifty dancers, male and female, from corps de ballet members to senior principal dancers. The mirrors remained uncovered during this class enabling the dancers and teacher to use them as part of the class process. The pianist played a grand piano in one corner next to the seating.

The structured content of the class opens the technical practice of the individual up for examination and refinement as progressively dancers work through a comprehensive range of representative material in its logical development from simple to complex co-

ordinations, from slow to fast, and from basic to virtuosic. Company class potentially has a role in bonding an ensemble, now increasingly drawn from a range of training establishments and ballet traditions, to enable a shared and coherent company dancing style and aesthetic in performance of particular repertoire. Historically de Valois frowned on Royal Ballet dancers taking classes outside the company (although some did, notably Fonteyn taking opportunities to study with Vera Volkova and Beryl Grey with Audrey de Vos; see Grey 2017); and the company continues to provide classes given by in-house and occasional guest teachers six days a week. One of my aims in examining this class was to look for underlying shared conceptions of ballet in this class, and attempt to identify where and how they might be articulated.

Anthony Giddens defines what he calls the “sociological imagination” as “...being able to “think ourselves away” from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew” (Giddens 1991 p18 cited in Tinning 2004 p 233). As a dancer myself, by this exercise of detailed observation I strove to “make the familiar strange” (ibid. p233) in order to discover what may be taken for granted in the daily practice of ballet dancers, and its implications. Much communication and instruction in classes is delivered in an exiguous shorthand, essential to save precious studio time and maintain a warming flow of physicality. It is decipherable because of shared assumptions, rooted in years of embodied practice and not verbalised, as Bourdieu has shown (see Chapter 3.5). It is easy therefore in the speed of assimilation and doing not to consider the significance and implications of details of material or execution, or their lack of specification, and what they might tell us of the underlying conceptions inherent in ballet classes.

In the absence of any overt discussion or verbalisation of broader aims within this class, and without additional insight that might be provided through interview data, I looked to the detail of the dance content of the class as presented by the teacher, and its

surrounding aural and environmental context, to see what light these might shed on its purpose and assumptions. In any dance class the teacher is not simply a guide to defined external sources of knowledge but usually an exemplar of the knowledge itself in practice. The teacher of a codified technical form such as ballet therefore is often the primary learning resource as well as the instructor, tutor or mentor; potentially modelling not only performing expertise but also artistic knowledge of the form, creative behaviours and embodied understandings. If concepts, attitudes and aesthetics embedded within the dance material are to be identified and understood, it therefore becomes vital to elucidate the detail of what information the teacher communicates or leaves out, in order to understand what students may be learning. My detailed analysis is intended as a critical reading of the “text” of this particular class.

5.1 Documentation method

Transcribing the events of the class in chronological sequence led me to devise a tabular observation pro-forma divided into four main areas of activity:

- what the teacher communicates, through instructions, actions, commentary and feedback
- what the dancers do
- the music provided
- any additional comments or events not fitting within the above categories.

Other than occasionally to describe movements which are demonstrated but not made verbally explicit, when transcribing I curbed my instinct as a dancer automatically to flesh out and expand the shorthand instructions given by the teacher, which would foreground my own interpretation and assist me to execute the *enchaînements* and combinations were I participating in the class myself. I chose instead to note down what the teacher actually communicated, verbally and otherwise, so that what the

dancers did in response could be evaluated in relation to this. By documenting all in writing it became possible to see how different modes of communication are integrated and combined. It also becomes possible to assess what aspects of the dancing are overtly commented on and thereby prioritised; and what is left unsaid, either assumed - or perhaps ignored? One might thus deduce the purpose of the class, and discuss what it reveals about the understandings of the teacher and dancers participating; and thence determine where there may be space within it to explore ballet as a form from an artistic perspective. This analysis gives a basis for comparison with other classes observed to build a picture of what today's ballet classes are actually preparing dancers to do.

I recorded the teacher's use of French ballet terminology as it appeared; there can be significant slippage and confusion between different training schools and styles as to how terminology is used and understood, and habits in use of terminology can therefore be suggestive as to the pedagogic lineage of particular teachers. BM brings an internationally inflected understanding to his teaching at the Royal Ballet, his knowledge rooted in training at the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington DC and dancing with Le Jeune Ballet de France. As an example, here at one point he uses the term *sous-sus*; this is not included either in the British *Royal Academy of Dancing Dictionary of Classical Ballet Terminology* (Ryman 1995), nor in the French text Prudhommeau and Guillot's *Grammaire de la Danse Classique* (Prudhommeau & Guillot 1969), but is defined in Gretchen Ward Warren's American compendium *Classical Ballet Technique* (Ward Warren, 1989 p353). However BM's demonstration of the *sous-sus* as a step up to 5th position differed from Ward Warren's very particular use; even though the ending position was the same, the mode of arrival was through a different action. Ward Warren follows Vaganova's precept that this movement is a *relevé* in 5th (normally to full pointe) which travels slightly, either forward or back; this is corroborated by Cecchetti expert Richard Glasstone in his illustrated dictionary of

classical ballet terms (Glasstone 2013 p53). Vaganova (trans. Chujoy 1946, p110) however calls it *sus-sous*, and like Glasstone additionally specifies that it may travel sideways. Glasstone provides both variants of the name and also identifies the action under the name of *temps de cou de pied* (Glasstone 2013 p55). This is one small example of the potential ambiguity of technical nomenclature. It highlights a variety of possible interpretation, and crucially demonstrates how ballet's knowledge and vocabulary can be seen to evolve differently in different circumstances as a result of the processes of oral transmission.

Ballet classes are rich in such specific (if contested) technical content, so much information needs to be communicated and assimilated in a short time. This class provided a powerful example of the multimodal nature of balletic content communication, which here enabled the simultaneous transmission of information at different levels including the following:

- French terminology for specific movements and postures
- Instructions refining details of execution (eg. action, direction, quantity, spatial orientation) in English
- Onomatopoeia or exaggerated delivery of words to suggest movement quality or emphasis
- Musical information in the form of sing-song and rhythmic intonation of instructions or even singing, dancers' counts
- Punctuation by additional sounds such as clapping, slapping the thigh, or clicking fingers
- Demonstration of movements and indicative gestures.

These are seamlessly combined to form a composite technical argot, intelligible to experienced dancers and to the accompanying pianist, if incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Verbal content can be squeezed; technical terms are not only reduced to bare essentials shorn of explicit qualifying details but are sometimes truncated to monosyllables, the better to fit into the rhythmic delivery of instructions. Thus the

verbal information can be highly ambiguous, leaving plenty of room for varying interpretations, and requiring additional information delivered in other modalities to supplement and clarify specific details of the task. The following is a verbal transcription of the setting of a *pirouette enchaînement* (passages in square brackets indicating the teacher's actions) which took 53 seconds to set:

"[Walking to centre, turning to face mirror] Let's start *en face* [feet in 5th with right foot front, slaps thigh of right leg] rotate this leg *en dehors* [left hand up to side] *attitude* and carry side [half singing tango rhythm], *coupé* to the *pas de bourrée* [clap hands down to indicate feet 5th] *relevé passé* [hand comes up to shoulder indicating *relevé* action] and 5th, *pirouette* [arms winding in], left *attitude front* [slapping leg] carry side *coup- pas de bourrée* [marking legs less precisely, using arms to indicate] *relevé passé* [drawing up left leg and left hand to shoulder], 5th [arms down to indicate] *pirouette*, then stepping *sous-sus croisé* [with *port de bras* to open 4th]. Two groups please! [holding two fingers up to pianist] Aaand... thank you."

(RB class transcript @36mins 14secs)

Physical demonstration also potentially includes within it different modalities; as exemplified here, BM in his delivery is able to switch instantly between these modes:

- Full execution of movements as they would be danced – demonstration
- Walking through sequences half doing the actions – marking
- Use of the arms to indicate the action of the legs
- Smaller hand and forearm marking indicating larger movements with simplified abstracted gestures.

The dancers in this class are similarly able to follow his intended bodily communication when it changes from large scale and literal to small scale and highly schematic. They often use minimal marking hand gestures themselves to accompany his instructions as they are delivered, not just listening and watching but actually imprinting a schematic version of the movement task – its sequence, rhythm and basic directional and action characteristics - in their bodily consciousness physically. But sometimes they show no physical evidence of their comprehension until they perform the sequence set, continuing to stretch or gently move while listening and/or watching, occasionally drinking water or adjusting practice dress or shoes. They certainly do not vocalise their

understanding; and at no point does anyone question the instructions or request clarification. Apart from one request for other dancers to move forward to make space, and occasional inaudible comments or friendly interactions exchanged with colleagues while awaiting their turn to perform an *enchaînement*, they remain silent for the whole of this class. Their response to the teacher's propositions comes in the form of their dancing.

5.2 Class analysis

Notable in this class is its overall pace. Most ballet classes in the UK at advanced vocational and professional level, while covering the same generic content, are longer than this, usually one and a half hours. Given the schedule of rehearsals and possible performances that a major ballet company might have in the working day, the work done in a company class may recede in importance, being seen less as a period of study and more as a preparatory activity for performance related work to come. In addition to reduced time there is a significantly large number of dancers in this class. Given its numbers the Royal Ballet would usually run more than one morning class, dividing male and female dancers; although full company classes of this type are likely to happen when the company is on tour. In this case providing a full company class may have been a conscious decision as part of the programming of World Ballet Day, to enable viewers to see both female and male dancers at work. Accommodating the number of participants entails the division of the dancers into smaller groups for all the *enchaînements* in the centre as well as for *grands battements* at the barre.

Strategies to save time and maximise the dancing therefore include a non-stop approach to barre work, the music for one exercise barely completed as BM sets the next, and some exercises executed on both sides without break; so that the entire barre-work sequence, despite including no fewer than five *battements tendus* and

glissés combinations (as opposed to two or three), is completed in less than 28 minutes. This is noteworthy at a time when it is widely perceived that more time is spent on barre work than a century ago, arguably to the possible detriment of allegro work and jumping later in the class, but seen to be in accordance with safer dance practice. Influential American teacher Maggie Black's barres typically lasted 55 to 60 minutes, admittedly as part of a two hour class (Zeller, 2009 p65); by contrast Bruhn and Moore cite the traditional Bournonville class barre as being 15 minutes long (Bruhn & Moore, 2005 pp51-52). In the centre for more expansive travelling material groups of dancers organise themselves to take over without pause so that *enchaînements* run continuously through many repetitions, with the pianist playing ever longer stretches.

In the context of this accelerated class there is little time for teaching feedback for the refinement of technical or performative execution. Such as there is must be delivered simultaneously with the execution, either to the class as a whole or to specific individuals. BM provides a running sound commentary on the exercise content almost throughout execution, over the musical accompaniment, combining information and feedback, speaking with a raised sing-song voice and sometimes singing including:

- reminders as to content, through terminology sometimes truncated to fit with the music, and monosyllabic details such as to direction
- technical exhortations drawing attention to particular aspects of execution and action
- rhythmic vocalisations and onomatopoeia spelling out emphases, timing or movement quality
- other body sounds, mainly clapping and finger clicking to mark the rhythm
- evaluative comments and encouragement

Transcription of an early barre work exercise, *battements glissés* set to a polonaise, provides a typical example of this:

“Good y ya pa – in in in [clapping], in in good! Cross cross cross [clapping] a- in in – good and out out out out out 5th reverse – in in in, cross cross, cross and cross and cross [clapping] and in 5th... three brushes front back front *soutenu* other side – [singing the melody, walking up and down at edge of class] in 5th and 5th and 5th, *cinquième* [points finger at a dancer's feet] pa in ya pa pa, cross and cross da di ya padada padada, back... [fingers continue clicking beat] in – and in [clapping] and in and in, cross... good! In in... pa pa... good, thank you.”

It is possible that some dancers may not fully have taken in the instructions for a particular exercise; however, albeit unseen the movement material is all within a highly familiar conventional framework, following a traditional sequence, developing short phrases by performing them in different directions, in reverse or on the other side of the body. In the case of not knowing, the dancer at this level would be able to follow others, instantaneously assimilating the dance material, and there should be little need to remind of what comes next in the sequence. Examples in this class of dancers making mistakes in the sequence are both minimal and rare, and recovery and resumption of the set sequence is immediate.

One might assume that constant instructional commentary in a class full of highly experienced dancers who know what they are doing is unnecessary; however BM's highly rhythmic and continuous vocal delivery contributes to giving the class a feeling of urgency. He is in some senses singing the dancing, and perhaps by this not only drawing the dancers' attention to a particular rhythmic precision in the articulation of the material but also galvanising their energy through maintaining a sense of relentless and emphatic action. The class therefore has something of the quality of a continuous warm-up such as might be found in a jazz dance or aerobics class, where the teacher/instructor demonstrates and instructs the dancers who copy and follow without stopping. As Anne Cazemajou reveals in her detailed study of a contemporary dance class: "the ceaseless reiteration of instructions imposes a real rhythm of work" (Gore et al. 2013 p136).

Highly experienced musician PS plays from memory a wide repertoire of classical and more popular melodies, and for longer sequences of dancing is able to improvise and develop endless variations on them, modulating between keys and changing expressive mood and intensity while maintaining the rhythm, pulse and phrase length

specified by the teacher. Virtually no direct verbal instruction is given as to musical content; however BM's instructions as to the dance content give clear indication of both rhythm and speed, and on a couple of occasions PS picks up and plays the very melody that BM has half sung while setting an exercise. This is highly skilful piano accompaniment, providing music that is both appropriate and supportive of the task set, and with the potential to inspire and stimulate musical response in the dancers. However BM's constant commentary riding over this would seem to impose a particular rhythmic conception, rather than leaving the phrasing of material open to the individual's choice. Arguably this stifles an opportunity for dancers to develop personal artistic and expressive intention through their performance of *enchaînements*; and through giving the focus of their attention in performance to their relationship with the music rather than the exhortations of the teacher.

It would therefore seem that a primary purpose of such a class is to provide an aerobic warm-up and conditioning in preparation for the day's other dancing activities. On the Royal Opera House website Brian Maloney is now listed as Ballet Rehabilitation Specialist and Class Teacher, a member of the Royal Ballet Healthcare and Fitness Staff. A former colleague recently observed that there is no longer a contractual obligation for dancers of Birmingham Royal Ballet to do a minimum number of company classes (in my day 4 per week); if they prefer they can use the gym for weight training and other exercise regimens. The company class is arguably evolving in response to this by including additional exercise content designed to promote physical requirements for flexibility and strength. Here at the barre non-balletic warm-up movements infiltrate some of the exercises, non-dancing stretches replace some of the *ports de bras*, limbering rather than phrases of dance movement, evidence of the importance of physical agendas in the class beyond the refinement of dancing and understanding.

The Royal Ballet is a full time company with a heavy rehearsal and performance schedule; the development of stamina and strength are therefore important considerations in the prevention of injury. But it is also a repertory company charged with making a wide range of British ballet's historic repertoire available to the public. The night before this class they had performed Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*. Two weeks after, the company premiered an all Ashton programme of *Scènes de Ballet*, *Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan*, *Symphonic Variations*, and *A Month in the Country* at the Royal Opera House. Less than three weeks after the Ashton programme another programme was premiered, with works by current choreographers Kim Brandstrup, Liam Scarlett and Christopher Wheeldon; and late November saw the premiere of Carlos Acosta's new version of *Carmen*. These works ranging from the dramatic to neo-classical potentially require a range of skills and movement styles; and dancers would need to be able to move between these within the rehearsal day. Thus an important agenda of the daily class of professional ballet dancers of the Royal Ballet would surely be not only ensuring mastery of the essential vocabulary of the *danse d'école* but enabling dancers to understand how it may be adapted in differing choreographic contexts; and to prepare them for the technical challenges of its variable use in the ballets they will perform.

So it is notable that the content of this class as set forth by BM is mainly defined by leg action and steps. Arm and body movements, *port de bras* as the carriage of the arms, remain very rarely verbally specified. BM does indeed demonstrate some specific arm movements and positions, but often his arms are co-opted to indicate instead the actions of the legs even when he is demonstrating these; this may partly be to ensure that these are visible to all class participants. Throughout the class there are numerous personal variants in the use and positioning of the arms, which are accepted by the teacher without remark. The *port de bras* thus could seem to be generally performed here as a graceful and optional embellishment rather than as structurally

integral to the execution of a particular movement or phrase. The torso in some senses appears to act as a buffer zone between the different actions of arms and legs, rather than the dynamic centre through which they are related through the torsion of *épaulement*, never mentioned on this occasion. This would seem a very different conception of the use of the arms and body from that necessary to perform Ashton's choreography, as Morris has identified: "In many of Ashton's dances, however, the movements are frequently initiated from the torso..." (Morris 2012 p19). BM's teaching approach would appear more in line with his Russian influenced conservatoire training; while as a performer he experienced dancing Ashton's work, he would not have experienced the long term symbiotic relationship between choreography and training in Britain that fed Ashton's work and shaped the dancers on which it was originally made, some of whom subsequently passed on their embodied knowledge through teaching.

In this class another strong but unverbaised influence shapes the conception of the dancing without remark, perhaps a classic example of the operation of the *habitus*. The wall of mirrors forms a powerful presence, especially in the centre work. It is proactively used by both teacher and dancers in the labour of maintaining a particular technical look and level of accomplishment. It enables the teacher to instruct the dancers and demonstrate with his back to them; and rather than looking at him directly they often follow his actions by watching his reflection in the mirror. He also has the option to watch them dancing through the mirror rather than by looking at them directly. The eye-line and focus of the dancers often suggest that they are watching themselves in the mirror while dancing, self correcting and adjusting in response to what they see, enabling them to continue work on personal improvement independently of the teacher's direct input. As with the optional arms it would therefore appear that other than for spotting in *pirouettes*, eye-line and focus are not necessarily regarded as intrinsic to the technical execution of much balletic vocabulary. Dancers can thus acquire a habit of gazing out to the audience (here represented by the mirror)

regardless of consideration of either the dramatic relevance of such a focus or its distorting effect on whole body-line, shape and movement, disregarding the need to cultivate a skill of appropriate eye focus.

But it would in any case be hard in this class not to look in the mirror because of the spatial design of the dance material. Although some steps are aligned to or travel on the diagonal, in all *enchaînements* the upright torso is predominantly focused towards the mirror as designated “front” with few changes of body direction other than in *pirouettes*, sequences mainly moving from side to side while travelling generally forward. This pragmatically enables another group of dancers to start from the back immediately after completion without break; but it also facilitates continuing self-monitoring and scrutiny and may also embed a bodily habitus of looking out to the audience as front in the execution of balletic *enchaînements*. Narrative ballets such as those of MacMillan and Ashton require the construction of an onstage world with focused interaction between characters, and danced action as expressive of dramatic intent or situation, rather than the direct outward projection of virtuosic skill to an audience. Understanding of focus and direction and how they may shape or affect dancing action is a matter for technical study, which the class could address to prepare dancers who will have to perform this sort of repertoire. Advanced technical competence should include abilities to modify the focus and framing of particular vocabulary.

There are examples of the exercise of individual choice of material within a limited range in this class, perhaps to be seen as examples of the “regulated improvisations” that Bourdieu describes (Bourdieu trans. Nice 1990 p57); for example 16 counts at the end of the *ronds de jambe* exercise at the barre which dancers use freely to stretch in a variety of ways and timings. There are variants in the execution of *battements frappés*; some dancers striking the floor with the ball of the foot, others maintaining a fully

stretched foot throughout, some performing parts of the exercise on the *demi-pointe*. Later most female dancers opt to do the centre exercises *en pointe*, but some do not, and others change back into flat slippers for jumping *enchaînements*. In *pirouettes* the number of turns and the finish are open to variation; and the final opportunity to perform steps of virtuosity is completely at the discretion of the individual, a chance to practise personally selected and combined skills; for the women *fouetté* turn combinations of singles and doubles, or *manèges* of *jetés élancés*, for the men *manèges* including barrel turns, double *sauts de basques*, *jetés élancés* etc., or *grande pirouette* combinations with *tours a la seconde*, or a series of *entrechats*. It is noteworthy that such “technical tricks” are included within such a short class, evidently regarded as skills that all dancers should have and maintain, even though only a few principals are likely to execute such material in performance. Inclusion of such spectacular material may however be specific to a World Ballet Day class intended to attract and impress a wide online audience. But minimal instruction is given, and dancers obviously have particular tricks in mind that they are interested to work on.

Thus the class can be seen to offer these experienced dancers some limited opportunities to work independently according to their own priorities, and adapt material to suit their own perceived needs. These choices seem mainly to relate to increasing levels of mechanical difficulty of steps; conversely they also provide dancers with opportunities to revisit basic concepts through choice of simpler alternatives. There is little time or opportunity for consideration of artistic dimensions, for sensory exploration in terms of the linkage of movement, timing and phrasing, beyond the aesthetic refinement of particular poses through their scrutiny in the mirror. The prioritisation of visual scrutiny promotes concentration on the static shape rather than the elusive quality of movement, which must be perceived by the dancer through other sensory means, or revealed through the feedback of the teacher. These dimensions remain uncommented on in this class. It would thus appear that the main aims of this

class are the promotion of physical fitness, and mastery of technical elements and vocabulary passed on by the teacher, working within a tradition of training independent of the artistic characteristics of the repertoire that the company performs.

5.3 Emerging topics for analysis

From this detailed examination of observable characteristics broad questions began to surface as a framework for discussion of my case studies of specific classes. It is not possible within the scope of this dissertation to address all the interesting questions which emerged; such as the role of the mirror in learning and its effect on the dancer's dancing and sense of self. I have instead selected four major themes:

- Aims and purposes of the class – stated and unstated, both teacher's and dancers'.
- Role of the class as physical warm-up, and for fitness and maintenance of the dancing body.
- Relation of dance material in classes to specific ballets, and consequently the relevance of the class as a preparation for dancing balletic repertoire.
- Pace - of both the class and the material itself, and in the use of and relation to music; how this may affect the development of dancerly interpretation and creativity.

These emerging topics provide focus for the following four essays, comprising analysis and discussion of data gathered through my observations of diverse classes aimed at different constituencies within the ballet world, in relation often to historic accounts and wider evidence.

5.4 Classes and teachers observed

Pilot class Brian Maloney (BM) Royal Ballet World Ballet Day Company class, 4th October 2104

Roger Tully (RT) open class, 21st December 2016

Elmhurst Ballet School Post Graduate male class taught by Errol Pickford (EP), 28th February 2017

Royal Academy of Dance BA Hons Ballet Education class taught by Guy Burden (GB), 21st March 2017

London Studio Centre Musical Theatre final year class taught by Laura Hussey (LH), 28th March 2017

Windrush School of Ballet adult beginners' class taught by Pat Clapton (PC), 27th June 2017

Anna du Boisson (AduB) daily open class at Danceworks, 3rd November 2017

Northern School of Contemporary Dance Access to HE class taught by Eric Assandri (EA), 10th November 2017

Susie Crow (SC) Adult Beginners' class taught weekly over Autumn Term 2017

Anya Grinsted (AG) "Back to the Barre" class, 2nd January 2018

Sadly since the research was undertaken both Errol Pickford and Roger Tully have died, EP on 15th June 2018, and RT on 26th February 2020.

Profiles of each class can be found in Appendix 4; these accounts include:

- a contextual description of the class and its institutional setting and function within a course, school or college, or as a studio class offered by an independent teacher
- a brief biography of the teacher
- description of the space
- notes about musical accompaniment
- an outline of class content
- research data gathered and any methodological limitations.

All interviews with teachers and student groups were transcribed.

Chapter 6: Class aims and purposes

As a multifaceted and richly varied activity the ballet class has the potential to provide different ways to meet a variety of educational aims and purposes appropriate to the dancers who undertake it. My selection of classes to observe was designed to reflect the range of adult dancers of all ages and stages of experience and ability who do ballet classes; and thereby to reveal how their differing needs shape the selection and arrangement of balletic material and the pedagogical approaches employed by teachers, in meeting aims which may be both explicit and implicit. An implicit aim of every ballet technique class is continuance of the long-term work of developing the knowledge, technique and performance of emerging dancers. But in addition a class may be significantly shaped by more specific aims and purposes, defined by teachers in response to what they perceive as the needs and requirements of their students, sometimes openly stated, but not always made explicit.

Three major purposes were evident to a greater or lesser extent in the classes I observed: preparing dancers for professional employment, the transmission of balletic knowledge and skills, and developing the individual as a dancer, performer and potential artist. But these often overlapped; and other less explicit foci also emerged, such as class as a place for the education and training of future teachers, and to provide wider personal, social and cultural engagement. A fourth major purpose might be seen to be the development of physical fitness; but I will deal with that separately.

Laurence Stenhouse identifies four different processes as part of education in schools, consequently defining roles for the teacher in providing these:

- training – acquiring skills that will enable performance
- instruction – facilitating the learning of information in ways that lead to its

retention

- initiation – familiarisation with social values and norms
- induction – into thought systems and disciplinary or cultural knowledge

(Stenhouse 1975 p80)

In some classes observed, training, in the sense of focus on the acquisition of specific embodied skills, indeed seemed to loom largest. However with their variety of stated or implicit intentions it was evident that the role of the ballet teacher is multifaceted, and encompasses the other dimensions and roles that Stenhouse identifies as necessary for a wider process of education of learners.

6.1 Class for employment

An overt purpose of the vocational schools whose final year class practice I observed is to bring young dancers to a stage of competence and knowledge which will enable them to get a job as a professional dancer. The classes at Elmhurst and London Studio Centre had an urgent and explicit focus on preparing for the audition process that students would need to undergo in their search for employment. This could also be seen as part of a wider agenda of cultivating autonomous professional behaviours that would aid dancers' progression and support them through what might be an insecure and changing career. Thus in addition to mastering balletic vocabulary, these classes were clearly initiating students into the culture and appropriate social behaviours of the professional dance world, and instilling in them habits and strategies of autonomous study.

At Elmhurst the male graduate class I observed was part of preparation for the class group to be viewed by visiting directors the following week as a pre-audition.

Birmingham Royal Ballet Director David Bintley dropping in to view this group may have been informal, but for a brief while brought the tensions of audition vividly to the

fore. The class material had been set by Errol Pickford to show off the students' capabilities, therefore it included a huge range of balletic vocabulary organised in long *enchaînements* with relatively little repetition of technical elements in their composition. This rehearsed and repeated class was about showing learned material and focusing on its presentation. There was little unseen content – barre work exercises which nevertheless combined familiar elements, and possibly a *petit allegro* warm-up jump.

The centre of the class seemed theatricalised and choreographed within a classic late C19th ballet convention – with *enchaînements* as miniature variations. The material had a performative style that encouraged presentation conforming to an image of the male dancer as virtuoso technician and *danseur noble* (very much the persona in which the teacher himself had excelled); and there was some leeway at the end to show personal ability in individual steps of virtuosity. Students were organised in what seemed to be pre-arranged groups; *enchaînements* included entrances and exits of these groups into and out of the dancing space. This was therefore an opportunity to see students in performance rather than study or rehearsal mode.

For aspiring ballet professionals audition may be just one part of a protracted process of getting to know and be known by a company, to see if a dancer is the right fit for a particular ensemble, where changing repertoire can demand a broad range of dance skills and qualities. This can involve being scrutinised in training by visiting directors as at Elmhurst, but also visiting companies and joining in with their classes, which over time provides a more nuanced picture of the personality and abilities of the individual in relation to the existing group; the class as a means of socialisation, providing an opening for absorption of the young dancer into a particular community of practice. Outside the classes he taught EP was instrumental as a mentor in helping the students in his group find suitable opportunities for such encounters (EP interview @ 33mins 20secs to 36mins 30secs).

The class I observed at London Studio Centre was preparation for a very different type of audition process. This group comprised students developing as all round “triple threat” performers – able to sing, act and dance. Ballet seems valued in musical theatre circles for the technical skills it affords dancers, also its perceived virtues of clarity in execution and professionalism; and is therefore a common component in musical theatre auditions. Laura Hussey explained how for most musical theatre students auditioning for a chorus role, their first exposure was likely to be a dance call; it was thus essential for them to make a good impression in dance if they were to be given an opportunity to demonstrate their other and in some cases greater talents of singing and acting. Ballet in this instance acts as a filter of crucial technical requirement, demanding a base line of particular skills: high kicks, *pirouettes*, jumps. Such dance audition calls would be likely to be very crowded and shortened; LH suggested that a barre might be reduced to *pliés* with *ports de bras* (to show the ability to bend) *battements tendus* (for speed, leg and foot line) and *grands battements* (height of leg) (LH interview @4mins, and LSC class transcript p23).

LH's overall aim with students in their final year is to produce competent, technically capable dancers who can get through to the next round in audition (LSC class transcript @3mins); performers confident in their own abilities, able to “act the part” of the ballet dancer as required. Rather than developing personal interpretation, these students were encouraged to consider what was being looked for by those conducting an audition in terms of the specific show, and to try to provide and adapt to that:

“...if you're in the second group you're kind of lucky all the time aren't you, because then you're going – I've got that minute, seconds more to watch it, I've got another moment to think about how I want to look – and how I want to appear. And also what they're gonna want, what is the show, what is, you know, the thing they're doing, do I have to look a particular way; and if you do, make sure you present it, yeah? You've got to be quite grainy about this stuff nowadays, no time for being shy. Right?”

(LH in LSC class transcript pp29-30)

Elmhurst students were also looking to find out how they might fit in with company directors' wishes, but this could perhaps be less obvious to discern in an audition for a mixed repertoire company as opposed to a single production; not simply about a particular look and skillset, but also about personal rapport and abilities to adapt, learn and collaborate and fit into a particular company culture (Elmhurst student group interview @9.20-15.45mins). Anecdotes emerging in interview suggested the anxieties of trying to read directors' wishes and intentions, and worries over class etiquette; such as the advisability of putting oneself forward in class or staying decorously back:

“- and it shows in the way you dance, and it shows in the way you behave around the studio when you're waiting to dance.”

“... I went to an audition and the director got really mad with this kid for pushing in front when it wasn't his turn; and he got like – he didn't get called back.”

“When I went to my audition in Croatia he had a go at me for folding my arms; and asked me if I looked bored during his choreography...”

“I got told off for being at the back when I was like in the last numbers [laughter] I was like number ninety-five...”

“But then they say that, but then some teachers say you need to push to the front?”

(Diverse speakers, Elmhurst student group interview from 12mins 22secs)

Musical theatre students going forward for audition need to know how to warm themselves up effectively (in the absence of provision of a proper warm-up), pick up sequences quickly, and be able to summon specific skills very rapidly (such as pirouettes). Their fast-paced class therefore had an emphasis on speed and fitness; rather than exploring the diversity and range of balletic material, it was about building familiarity in the efficient execution of limited generic balletic phrases and schemas. Throughout the class LH drew attention to what it might be important to be able to show in audition; and encouraged students to be both confident in their knowledge and abilities, and “smart” about presenting themselves to best advantage in a hugely competitive environment, where candidates could be thrown out at any stage. Even the student dress code for class was co-opted to this presentational end. Students wore black leotards and mostly pink ballet tights (some black) without leg warmers, shorts, skirts or track pants obscuring legs and feet. Leotard styles however were

varied, with students encouraged to find a style flattering to them personally.

LH had through repetition instilled into the student group specific use of head and arms for particular steps, positions and phrases, to “uniform” them and give consistency in execution of familiar combinations (LH interview @5mins). This was evident throughout the class material. This could be useful in preparing dancers for ensemble work; but was also deemed important by LH in building confidence in the dancers' understanding and knowledge of balletic material; she saw confidence as crucial to enabling these students to present themselves successfully and make an immediate positive impact (LH interview @7mins).

Students going into musical theatre might rarely be in a position to maintain the regularity of ballet class that they had become used to at LSC; few productions might provide classes, pre-show warm-ups may not necessarily be balletic, and attending open classes could be costly, if indeed such classes were available. A subtext of the class was the recognition that once these students get jobs they will have to take personal responsibility for maintaining their dance technique; therefore a focus on making the students self-sufficient, able to look after themselves. In addition to specific technical corrections LH drew attention to study methods to help individuals become independent and autonomous learners, able to maintain their practice at a good level; devices such as the idea of an “MOT” checklist of points to work on for *pirouettes*, and dividing unfamiliar *enchaînements* into “boxes” for more effective learning (LSC class transcript allegro *enchaînement* pp54-58).

So as much as being about working on and improving the dancers' dancing and technical abilities this class could be seen as a workshop in professional practice and behaviours, preparing students for their transition to working life. Perhaps one of the reasons that these students were so enthusiastic about ballet classes was that LH had

managed to make both the content and the delivery directly and openly relevant on different levels to their chosen career paths in commercial theatre; and convey a strong sense of the potential value of ballet training even for those not intending to become ballet dancers.

Anna du Boisson's open class at Danceworks caters to a much wider range of dancers, including professionals in ballet companies or West End productions, and top vocational students with an indeterminate range of career destinations in view; as well as experienced non-professionals. In interview AduB stated that her primary intention for these classes was "to generate and reaffirm the love of dance" (AduB interview @40secs); this arose from her perception that a lot of dancers have been through damaging experiences elsewhere in their training, and need individual help in rebuilding their confidence as well as developing their technical mastery. Class content, unplanned in advance and therefore potentially responsive to the emerging needs of the ever-changing clientele in front of her, was relatively simple and familiar but with potential for personal elaboration, allowing the accommodation of dancers at a range of stages, and coming from different schoolings and stylistic backgrounds. Consistently high numbers of regular long-term attenders both professional and amateur attest to the enjoyably "dancey" aspect of her classes and their energising and welcoming environment.

However repeated mentions in interview also confirmed her desire to help dancers get jobs; getting students through the hurdles of selection either to the next stage of advanced vocational training, or from training to employment. AduB sees her "job", both in teaching this open class and at her school Young Dancers' Academy, as essentially enabling dancers to find work as dancers; preparing them for the demands of company and show directors and choreographers. Unlike LH, AduB does not intend to "uniform" dancers in her class stylistically. Although providing a disciplined

framework as support, she allows space for dancers from a range of backgrounds to bring their personal way of doing things, and to vary the basic dance “text” according to their needs and desires; for example by working on pointe, embellishing steps with beats, additional turns, using alternative *ports de bras* etc.. She welcomes the variety that this gives as refreshing to her own teaching practice.

But a need to meet widely perceived standard expectations and requirements of today's ballet company directors and choreographers, notably in the form of high leg extensions and multiple pirouettes, was also observed and accepted. Geraldine Morris in her research into international ballet competitions points to this in the context of the Prix de Lausanne, whose prizes offer a gateway to elite training and potential employment with major ballet companies:

“Yet, high extensions and big, split-jumps dominate the Prix performances, to the detriment of light and shade, articulate footwork and flexible upper bodies... every arabesque is somewhere in the region of 180 degrees and every jump is big.”

(Morris, 2008 p45)

Although Morris critiques this in relation to performances of the 19th century repertoire solos required of Prix contestants, Anya Grinsted's young vocational students also identified these as salient characteristics of some current ballet choreography, citing as example the hyperextensions of Wayne McGregor's work: “...all the dancers want to be able to do the high legs that he requires for his works.” (AG student group interview @11mins). In their minds this was part of a desire of dance makers creating for ballet companies today to go beyond and do something different:

“...so I think they're trying to push it, and that they're using the bodies to push it to see the extremes of how your bodies can move, and things like that, so extensions...”

(AG student group interview @11mins 40secs)

AduB's simple generic classwork gave the professionally focused dancers among her students the opportunity to practise these apparently essential stand-out skills and virtuosic accomplishments; and dancers' choices for elaboration were very much

orientated towards optimally presenting such athletic technical abilities. Dancing in DanceWorks' most public studio, surveilled by watchers waiting at the door for the next class, and through the windows by those entering the building, reflected in the mirrored walls even when not in the centre of attention, participants in her class are constantly on show and susceptible to keen eyed judgement from members of the wider dance community. So there is in the class environment some underlying replication of an audition or competition situation, where individuals in a large group must seize fleeting opportunities to make an arresting impression and stand out from the crowd. It would take a strong sense of personal identity and study priorities to ignore this subtle pressure to perform for those watching.

In all these classes the emphasis was thus less on new learning or investigation, and more on refining the execution and presentation of the already known. Although apparently a versatile dancer is wanted by employers, beyond showing an ability to pick up material swiftly and move fast, only those dancers who may be required to address a range of historic ballet repertoire seem likely to need to demonstrate comprehensive mastery and understanding of ballet's extensive vocabulary, or the ability to combine it in unusual and substantial *enchaînements*. As evinced in ballet's proliferating competitions balletic ability can seem to boil down in wider perceptions to a limited range of generic technical skills tending toward eye-catching gymnastic magnitude rather than artistry and sophistication (see Morris 2008); and to a hyper-flexible body capable of fluid contemporary movement within a current ballet aesthetic of extended lines.

6.2 Class for transmission of knowledge

Such classes as those discussed above assume high levels of knowledge and

competency acquired over years of study in those participating. Classes that cater for late starters in dance or those coming to ballet from alternative dance disciplines have by contrast the responsibility to impart and embed huge amounts of information, often in limited time. This can be both in the leisure context of adult beginner classes, or in vocational dance contexts such as Northern School of Contemporary Dance which takes a mixed intake of talented students with dance potential; some of whom have years of ballet training, but others to whom ballet is completely unknown. Here the role of the teacher is not simply facilitator and coach but also source of knowledge; and the primary focus of carefully selected and composed *enchaînements* is didactic rather than display.

As clearly stated by Eric Assandri, the purpose of the NSCD Dance Access Course class I observed was to induct students into the fundamentals of ballet technique - which he defined as positions, use of arms, alignment, posture and directions – as realised through balletic vocabulary (EA interview @29secs). For him these basics opened the door to consideration of breath, space, movement and musicality, thus relating directly to the students' work in contemporary dance disciplines; study of ballet developing a set of transferable skills and attitudes. For those already with some experience of ballet his classes offer an opportunity to revise basic elements and find more accurate and nuanced ways to perform the material and work on placement.

Like the London Studio Centre musical theatre group, in interview the NRCD students clearly discounted themselves as future ballet dancers; but identified a range of practical and positive reasons for serious study of ballet and its potential advantages, identifying it as “a tool to improve our dancing” (NSCD student group interview @8mins 23secs). Alongside more technique-specific attributes such as training the feet and work on body placing and alignment, they identified avoidance of injury through slow working and highly developed articulation of movement:

“... ballet technique if you learn it properly it stops you getting injured – in anything ... if you follow ballet technique by the book, and you turn out from your hips and everything – you won't get injured in the contemporary because you're doing... it's comforting to know that it's - they've done the research and if you do it like this you'll be fine!”

(Student D, NSCD group interview @24mins 19secs)

But they also insightfully suggested wider transferable benefits such as cultivation of skills of movement analysis and attention to detail. The following metaphor voiced by one female student gives particular food for thought as to a justification of ballet as foundational training for these future independent contemporary dance artists:

“I think the way I see as well is like – if you had a violin – you'd look after your violin and you'd make sure it's in tune and I see – and that's an important part of the artistic process? Because otherwise you have a really bad violin? And I feel like ballet is tuning up your violin; that it's something that is – you have to do... in order to get your body in a state where then you can go and play this beautiful adagio... I don't know about music, but – yeah – that's the way I see it.”

(Student D, NSCD student group interview @26mins 7secs)

Roger Tully has also used this musical instrument metaphor, taking it one step further, describing the class not only as a place for the dancer to play the instrument, but also through dancing to construct it.

EA sees the students three times a week over the course of a term, and keeps the class the same for approximately three weeks, “adding little bits” as he deems appropriate, when dancers are ready. Repetition can enable deeper study, analysis, and gradual mastering of material, and is thus a crucial component of classes focusing on the learning of technique and the development of exact movement memory; a crucial skill that EA acknowledged was a new way of working for some students. The class was carefully planned, with a known barre that by the time I saw it after a few iterations needed no further instruction. *Enchaînements* in the centre consisted of simple short phrases (8 or 6 counts, maximum 16) providing ample opportunity for repetition, thereby building both familiarity with vocabulary and stamina especially in jumping; the ability of students to accurately and consistently repeat a phrase can also be a revealing indicator of their technical understanding and accomplishment. EA's

objective to cultivate clarity about basic balletic skills and concepts so that challenges can be progressively added revealed another wider educative goal; thereby to give students the sense that there is always more to be done and learned, that dancing is “never fully achieved”. A broader purpose of the class therefore the development of young dancers as lifelong learners; in interview EA referred to great dancers who never stopped learning throughout their careers:

“...it's like in a class, when you know that they get it and you add another more – another challenge on top of it, so that they get the bigger picture; so that they feel that “oh, there's different thing to learn!”... because then at the end, even the most experienced dancer will never – the – I've never-never-never ever heard a – a fantastic dancer, even a, a mega-mega principal, mega star say that he knows everything – or she knows everything. They always say “I'm always learning something every day”.”

(EA interview @38mins)

Pre-planned classes and strategies of repetition are similarly important in my own teaching of adult beginners in Oxford. I have taken to developing a single class over a whole term to give these dancers a chance to get beyond simply remembering the sequence. Anecdotal feedback suggests that people appreciate being able to register progress in known material gradually introduced, and are much encouraged that by the end of the term they can achieve what at the beginning they may have found impossible and daunting. Many beginners are initially overwhelmed by the amount of information they need to absorb in learning ballet material. Most people do one or two classes a week only, so it feels helpful to focus classes around introducing particular ideas, and create related exercises that can contribute to understanding them in different ways. The intention to provide as much repetition as possible without becoming tedious within each class, to help embed understanding of movement patterns and sensations through exploring them in different contexts and combinations; so that when technical concepts emerge fully fledged in *enchaînements* dancers find themselves better prepared to recognise, use and perform them. Through the judicious use of repetition we can spend time on improving body placement and

understanding line and direction, thus contributing to safer more competent practice and cleaner technique, also to a sense of clarity and co-ordination in dancing; most importantly enabling participants to dance joyfully, rather than simply execute the material.

Nevertheless even with pre-planned class content framed by the assessment and progression requirements of a formal training institution EA acknowledged the necessity for flexibility and response in the moment to adapt set work to learners' evolving needs. Older teachers observed working with advanced students in independent settings (Roger Tully, Anna du Boisson), had reached a stage beyond planning, relying on their decades of experience and instinct to respond in the moment to the perceived learning needs of the day. AG stresses in her Back to the Barre hand-out the fluidity of de Vos' teaching with material generated in the moment in response to the needs of the dancers in front of the teacher:

There is no set way to condition nor set sequence in the conditioning or ballet, it is not a syllabus or fixed regime – nor a Method. Audrey de Vos would not write anything down, nor film her work, for fear of it becoming fixed syllabus – to her it was a living art, always changing.

(Grinsted 2017 p2)

Although many of her classes at the Windrush School of Ballet are dealing with set syllabus material in preparation for Royal Academy of Dance examinations, for adult classes veteran teacher Pat Clapton similarly devises material in direct response to the students in front of her. She is aware that her adult beginner students often come for ballet as a type of physical exercise; so her initial objectives are to improve posture and help them to develop desired strength and flexibility. This was evident in her careful detailed teaching of simple class material with concern for placement especially of the legs and feet. However she also aims to cultivate an enjoyment of freedom of movement and music; and in the centre work her incorporation of freer natural movement with more classical elements was conducive to this. These highly experienced teachers thus demonstrate in their teaching an acquired professional

artistry, in the wider sense of “recognition, judgement and skilful performance” (Schön 1987 p22), that allows spontaneous and flexible response to the needs of their learners.

Despite his improvisatory approach to setting class material, and his independent studio context, Roger Tully nevertheless clearly saw as a purpose of his teaching the on-going transmission of what he calls “the classical dance”; particular concerns being understanding the detailed articulation of balletic movement, the relation of shape to movement in dancing, and the development of musicality. In interview he likened his class to a “Noah's ark” where aspects of ballet's body of knowledge he saw as in danger of disappearing might be passed on to future generations:

“...one of our coffee mornings... I said “you mustn't underestimate the value of us coming together, and exchanging and doing these principles together”... Noah was asked before the flood came to build the ark, and to put into the ark all the things which would be important after the flood. And I said we're in a period of flood at the moment, and nothing very much is going to change... but by enacting these things regularly, you are in fact putting things in the ark; they're going into the memory... so these things shouldn't be forgotten; so that when the time comes they can come out, and, and be put into use again.”
(RT interview @53 secs)

This class can be seen as continuing the independent studio teaching which emerged from the diaspora generated by the Ballets Russes and Russia's turbulent revolutionary and post-revolution history. A significant number of dancers from Russia later settled in London or Paris, bringing with them their embodied knowledge of Maryinsky training and classical repertoire; for example Legat, Cecchetti, Astafieva, Idzikowski and later Volkova in London, and Preobrajenska, Kschessinskaya, Egorova and others joining Carlotta Zambelli in Paris. RT took class with Idzikowski and Rambert, but the teacher who perhaps made the most profound impression on him was Kathleen Crofton, who had danced for Pavlova and channelled Pavlova's distillation of the Imperial Russian ballet style, as exemplified before its rationalisation by Vaganova and those following her. Initially mystified by Crofton's approach RT continued to study with her, absorbing and developing his own understanding of her enigmatic wisdom over years, eventually becoming a teacher in his own right (RT interview @37mins 53secs).

Here is an example of both the functioning of ballet's oral tradition whereby embodied knowledge and understanding is passed from one generation to the next through practical interaction in the studio, with particular consequence as a model of apprenticeship for dancers transitioning into teaching. In RT's class today are not only dancers but teachers continuing to develop their dance practice and understanding through their own regular bodily engagement and investigation. Patrick Wood, now teaching independently in South London, opted to study intensively with Roger as a way of developing as a teacher, rather than undergoing a certified teacher training course through one of the UK's dance teaching organisations. Clinton Luckett, now Assistant Director of American Ballet Theatre, took opportunities as a dancer to study with RT both in London and New York, and periodically returned to visit and touch base with him. Paris Opera Ballet *étoile* Jean-Guillaume Bart's teaching is influenced by his occasional study with RT. Jennifer Jackson's years of practical study with RT have profoundly informed her somatic approach to teaching ballet; and I am aware that my regular attendance at RT's classes has similarly influenced both the pedagogy and the compositional content of the classes I teach. Similarly Anya Grinsted and others such as her colleague Caroline Hutchings assimilated and absorbed the pedagogy and principles behind the composition of *enchaînements* through long exposure in the studio working with Audrey De Vos herself or her assistant; now reinterpreting it for their own students. As Dina Shmueli writes:

Audrey De Vos believed that a teacher must continue to develop, change and adapt to new things in order to help the student and dancer to cope as early as possible with practice and assignments, stress and pressures of our contemporary world of dance.

(Shmueli 2001 p3)

This artisanal model of teacher training seems in line with the development of a craft through Lave and Wenger's process of "situated learning" (Lave & Wenger 1991). In studying as a dancer over time with an experienced teacher the student gradually

absorbs the guiding principles and values exemplified in the teacher's *enchaînements*, instructions and comments; until the assimilated knowledge which has been fully digested can be confidently brought forth to a new materiality, and communicated to a new generation of students. While class material was never directly repeated in RT's classes, his *enchaînements* undoubtedly had a distinctive palette of balletic elements and ways of combining them; patterns and structuring rules eventually become apparent through elements endlessly recurring in variations which enable material to be examined, illuminated and experienced in subtly different contexts. Ben Spatz' theoretical clarification distinguishes technique as existing transferable knowledge from practice as the research which generates new knowledge (Spatz 2015). In accordance with this RT's class could be seen as a place for both the transmission of the existing knowledge that was RT's refined conception of ballet technique, but also for the personal practice as research generating new technical knowledge and understandings on the part of both him and those who studied with him.

A different format for the training of ballet teachers, formalised into the academic structure of a university accredited course, was evident at the Royal Academy of Dance where I observed students of the BA Hons Ballet Education course in class with Guy Burden. This class was part of a practical unit *BBE501: Technique and Performance* that incorporated not only technique classes but also the learning of classical and contemporary solos for assessment; and the objectives of the session I observed were dictated by course assessment requirements. Students need to meet defined criteria in the performance of a solo of their choice (one from two learned), here the Bransle Gay solo from Balanchine's *Agon*. Having had four ballet classes a week in the first year, these 2nd year students were now having two ballet sessions a week with GB which also needed to cover the learning of solos. In addition they have weekly sessions learning the RAD examination syllabus material they will become qualified to teach; but the amount of time available to them to work practically on

developing their own technical understanding more generically through unseen ballet classes is significantly limited.

Hence the class part of this session of necessity functioned less as an opportunity for technical study and experiment, and more as a warm-up to prepare and enable students to work in safety on challenging repertoire. So work on development of generic technical skills and understanding had on this occasion to be limited to a reduced barre of known content, and some little jumps. Module time had been saved by learning a set barre and repeating it over several weeks, so that no time needed to be spent in setting new exercises for this class:

“... I thought at the beginning of the semester it would make things go a lot quicker... if I taught them a set, set barre; and then... when we came to do class we see it as a warm-up. And I don't have to spend time teaching, 'cos if I spend time teaching a new barre every time, I then wouldn't have enough time really to get to what I think is the point, if that makes sense? Erm – so yeah, it's really a time saving thing... today I didn't even do many of the exercises, because we only had twenty minutes... I didn't even get through everything I wanted to get through...”

(GB interview @ 28mins 40secs)

A particular focus on the foot and leg was noticeable. GB has precisely articulated foot and leg action, and he is admired by his students as a dancing role model, but perhaps this focus in the material drew attention away from his other virtues of fluid whole body coordination and organic use of *épaulement*. The material incorporated set *ports de bras* and use of the head, but these were little commented on, so it was not clear whether they were intended as part of technical function, or rather the instilling of some conventional uses as an acceptable decorative finish to particular steps or combinations (similar to LH's “uniforming” of her class). This largely continuous warm-up also seemed designed to have an aerobic element (fast repetitive jumps and rises) to build core strength and stamina, a concern for GB given the small number of practical classes these students do, and appreciated from that perspective by the students.

The little time available for these young aspiring teachers to spend in practical exploration of varying technical concepts and challenges raises a question as to how a deep embodied understanding of underlying principles, and how they are manifest in dancing and may be communicated in different teaching contexts, can be developed within the framework of a course that puts a significant proportion of time into theoretical knowledge and written coursework. Here one is reminded of Molander's concerns about the loss of skill through the focusing of higher education in certain disciplines on "applied theory" rather than practice (Molander 1992).

GB in interview revealed the implicit tensions between the need to cover theoretically framed curriculum and assessment requirements and his own desire to enable the students to reach a level of performative mastery whereby they could convincingly demonstrate what they might require their own students to do:

"...I feel, personally, if they're going to be a teacher, they need to be able to demonstrate first and foremost what it is... that the students are trying to do... a teacher can be... talking about the movement intention, they can explain it... and that augments their demonstration; but I personally feel that it's – it's such a hugely important thing, I think that I dwell on that when I'm teaching our students here, because I want them – to go away and to be very clear and very precise and accurate with their demonstration?"

(GB interview @37mins 30secs)

"...when you're a student... you want to know what it looks like, don't you? ... if the foundation for dance is the technique – then – it's so vital that you're able to get that across... I really do think that it's how you, how you're physically able to show – as well as talk about it..."

(GB interview @39mins)

With this urgent agenda and clear view that the end purpose of the course is the producing of teachers rather than performers, the nurturing of a sense of artistry is seen as "the kind of cherry on the top" (GB interview from 39mins). Unless they are working in community or general education settings, development of creativity is also less likely to be the primary goal of these young teachers than getting pupils to pass graded examinations in ballet technique. But the kind of discursive pedagogical strategies promoted in a more academic framework – for giving ownership and choice

to students, encouraging them to work in groups, or share their thoughts and feedback through peer review - in GB's experience did not always have the desired effect of enthusing less vocationally minded students in their study of ballet; or developing abilities for autonomous deliberate practice as described by Ericsson (Ericsson 2010); or generating physical activity of the energy and critical depth of technical embodiment of dancers training to be performers. This was to some extent apparent in the solo workshop which followed, in which dancers tended to talk rather than practically explore and experiment with the material. In opposition to McFee's contention that understanding dance requires adopting the visual perspective of the spectator, rather than the kinaesthetic perspective of the practitioner (McFee 2011 Chapter 8) I would argue that deep understanding of this material requires a tactic of doing rather than discussing; and therefore to achieve this perhaps a particular vocational mind-set, here exemplified by GB himself through his own meticulous and committed demonstration and urgent manner:

"I think with the vocationally trained students like the Royal Ballet School, it could be more – 'do it again, do it again, do it again' because they've got – they've almost got more resilience? Whereas the students here, I find – because I've delivered this module twice through now... I can talk and talk and talk and say and say and say and say, but it comes a bit like this, you know? Schwooo [gesture]..."

(GB interview @47mins 52secs)

"...when I say to them... you've got to go beyond what you're doing, in order to make any sort of progress; you've got to push it – more... in order to go to the next level... they think they're working hard, but, but actually they're not – working as hard as they actually could be; but they think they are..."

(GB interview @52mins 30secs)

6.3 Class for developing the dancer

These dilemmas of finding strategies to encourage autonomous learning lead to consideration of a third important long-term aim for ballet classes; development of those attending as individuals, the nurturing and mentoring of the emerging dancer to

the best of their ability, whether as future professional or as engaged amateur dancer. The need to keep learning and developing skills does not finish with graduation from vocational training, so professional dancers need to find teaching that can continue to support them throughout their career. RT stressed the importance of the teacher's love and care that will enable students to flourish:

“...the first thing they have to know is that they're loved... and caring is a good enough word... if they feel they're cared for then they're accessible. You know because I mean, to learn to do something... requires an enormous amount of, um – letting go, doesn't it, you know? Vulnerability, one has to be vulnerable... And you can't be vulnerable if you don't feel you're cared for.”

(RT interview @1hour 7mins 30secs)

In the highly pressurized context of a commercial dance centre serving the professional dance community in the heart of London's West End, for dancers no longer in the safety net of vocational training or progressing through a structured dance examination curriculum, AduB's personal engagement and nurturing of individuals provides vital emotional as well as technical support:

“...I came to Anna's class because she's a good teacher and she sort of takes care of me, she's like my dance mom...”

(T, AduB dancer group interview @22seconds)

“I was told that she taught these amazing classes, and I showed up and I just – she's so invested in her students, and in – getting you to progress, and to learn, and to keep going; and it's what you need when you're – [T assent] – a professional, and there's not a lot of people who are really going to be on you, so – it's nice to have a teacher who actually cares.”

(W, AduB dancer group interview @1minute 26 seconds)

Despite the documented histories of abusive teaching practices and some disturbing anecdotes of dancers' personal experience, all the teachers I observed showed evidence of their genuine concern for the success and wellbeing of their students. However in larger classes in training establishments under the pressure of finite temporal goals such as preparation for audition or examination assessment for qualification, long term open-ended developmental aspirations for individual students can be submerged by more immediate objectives. So it is perhaps inevitable that the priority in teaching to nurture and develop the individual seems more prominent in

smaller studio classes away from defined institutional targets.

This was very much the case in the class I watched given by Anya Grinsted in the church hall in Chilworth. For these five students this class was a supplement to their regular vocational training received elsewhere in major schools and establishments during term time. Having attended AG's *Back to the Barre* intensive summer courses based on the teaching approach of Audrey De Vos, often at quite a young age, these students continue to return on a regular basis to work with AG in holidays and at half terms. So what is being provided by these classes that students still feel the need for even once they have reached top level vocational training?

“Anya's classes have a particular focus on working from within, being grounded; and I found a couple of years ago that it really helped me, um think about what I was doing, it gives you the time to pull the artistry together along with the technique, and that's what really helped me.”

(Student 4, AG student group interview @5mins 6secs)

Israeli dancer and teacher Dina Shmueli, who studied with De Vos from 1967 to 1970, clearly summarised De Vos' beliefs and pedagogy in an article published online in 2001. Shmueli saw De Vos' work as founded in her belief in the uniqueness of the individual dancer, who should not attempt to resemble other dancers but use the technique as a framework within which to develop their own personal understanding and interpretation of ballet's principles. Through her personalised teaching De Vos was able to help dancers who did not meet the ballet establishment's accepted physical norms to fulfil their potential, transcending perceived limitations to reach a high standard of execution. Her conditioning exercises were developed to prepare the dancer for dancing by initially relaxing the body to remove strain, cultivating a sense of the body's weight “both into the ground and in the movement” (Grinsted 2017 p1) and bringing mental focus to the dancer's centre and source of movement. Freedom of movement was essential to enabling the dancer to dance with enhanced qualities and expression; and dancers were encouraged to think about their action, and allow the movement to

emerge from this unblocked.

AG sees this work as being of particular benefit to adolescent students experiencing a growth spurt, but also as a preparation for professionals dancing Ashton's ballets and more contemporary choreography requiring varied use of the body (Grinsted 2017 p2). These young students seemed already to have absorbed the concept of movement generated from the centre of the body. Watching them at the barre I recorded my impression of their backs as animated in movement; even with careful placement of the hips they did not seem rigid, rather that a strong sense of lift and stability of the pelvis was enabling a wide range of upper body movement:

"We've been working quite a lot on the use of the body and *épaulement* and things... for me in a way sometimes although I think about it, I add it on top of the rest of my movement rather than - from it coming from the centre so that's the points in the class where I felt it coming from the centre and not like on top of my technique."

(Student 1, AG student group interview @ 3mins 53secs)

As well as providing opportunities for young students to find and experience these elusive and sophisticated sensations, AG's classes seemed also to serve a remedial purpose where students could get help with breaking down technical steps with which they were having difficulty and reconstructing them soundly. This kind of detailed analysis was visible on this occasion particularly in the time spent on a flowing phrase which led students into a turn in *arabesque*, and also on a *petit allegro* with a subtle combination of elements. Later in conversation AG gave as example a student who had been having trouble with *chaîné* turns at vocational school but was getting no help from her teacher there. AG had taken the step apart, helping the student to understand where the turning action was coming from, and the problem was solved gradually as the student practised the revised technique.

The student's own proactive commitment appears to have been a major contributory factor in resolving this; she took it on herself to practise what she had learned with AG.

This classic example in the context of ballet of Ericsson's deliberate practice (Ericsson 2010) also echoed the encouragement of habits of reflective practice (Schön 1987). A brief homily towards the end of the class revealed AG's overt encouragement of students to take responsibility for their learning, and the importance of learning even while queuing up in a class awaiting a turn to dance; like LH, advising them as to strategies for autonomous practice within class and outside it:

“First priority to get the sequence of steps... then arms and alignment... now thinking of the pitfalls technically... When you're marking it think... those are the things you've got to do... You are old enough and wise enough to know what is needed... while you are waiting feeling the body move a little, reminding yourself... You've got to do the thinking, 99 per cent that makes the good dancer, 1 per cent your school or teacher...”

(AG class observation notes @12.46pm)

It seems a source of frustration to AG that it apparently remains hard to convince major institutions to take an interest in and value this painstaking work; these according to Shmueli were always more interested in physical and stylistic uniformity than the diversity and individuality that De Vos promoted. De Vos in her day as well as enthusiasts had had detractors who condemned her revolutionary “pluralistic approach” (Shmueli 2001 p1) to teaching, and discouraged dancers from attending her classes; de Valois for one. Although these vocational students were at least allowed to attend class with other teachers during vacations, despite curiosity from some individuals there seemed to be little official interest in the knowledge or progress generated by students' experiences with such teachers from outside the establishment.

6.4 Developing the artist

Such classes may be seen to begin to encourage dancers not simply to think about the mechanics of their technique but also to develop their own awareness and individual interpretations in dancing; a first step on the road to artistry, the creative and artistic

use of the embodied knowledge they are acquiring. However it was a striking but not altogether surprising finding of my field research that in probing the purposes behind classes none of the teachers interviewed mentioned contribution to the development of creative or choreographic skills as an educational aim or desirable outcome of the ballet technique class. Errol Pickford openly recognised a responsibility to encourage the next generation of choreographers; but there would seem generally to be an assumption that this work is to be achieved elsewhere, through providing choreographic workshops and opportunities to make pieces for informal or student performance, as suggested by both EP and Anna du Boisson. The teachers and students interviewed nevertheless certainly regarded dancers as artists; which would suggest that the development of some understanding and level of artistry is a necessary part of the ballet technique class. It is here that the attitudes, thinking skills and behaviours that will be needed for creative use of ballet's knowledge can initially be nurtured as part of a continuum of artistic learning; the question being how is this practically to be achieved through the medium of technical study, and at what point the artist emerges from the chrysalis of the student dancer.

Similarly to Speer's interviews my interview of the young men at Elmhurst revealed a sense of the difficulty of clarifying the relationship between technique and artistry, with differing views as to whether artistry was part of technique or an added extra, as in these responses to the question as to what technique might encompass:

"I think the way you move your body; but also I think your artistry is part of ballet technique.... a lot of people will say oh you need to put artistry on top, you need to perform more; but I think a lot of the teachers would say that is part of your technique... 'cause it alters how you do stuff when you perform; use your head, and like upper body or not; so if you're adding that on that changes your physical technique because that is then part of performance; 'cause it's not all just your face."

"I think it's a hard question, because anyone could answer it differently."

(Elmhurst student group interview @6mins 43secs)

But there seemed to be consensus that technique in the more mechanical sense of

physical skills and ability was not enough for the performer, that on its own it was “boring” (as indeed some perceived class sometimes to be); and that the dancers they admired, such as Carlos Acosta and Ivan Vassiliev, were more than just their techniques:

“I'd say Carlos Acosta...”

“But see then I don't think he has clean technique.”

“Because he's got the artistry, and that's why everybody likes him.”

(Elmhurst student group interview @9mins 8secs)

“...but then someone like Ivan Vassiliev like, is messy, but he's amazing to watch because he's powerful... he performs...”

(Elmhurst student group interview @12mins)

Disentangling this understanding had powerful relevance to these students trying to work out what employers – and audiences - wanted of them:

“But I think generally people are looking for like performance, like as well as technique... that extra spice thing... you can be as technically proficient as you want but like if you're boring they won't want to hire you...”

(Elmhurst student group interview @11mins 30secs)

However when questioned as to whether they saw themselves as artists responses were uncertain; students were aware of today's conflicting pressures on them to be athletes as well as or instead of artists, but also of a sense of loss of agency when dancing in an ensemble rather than as an individual, chillingly echoing Toni Bentley's memorable turn of phrase and exemplifying the internalisation of Graham McFee's distinction between performers and choreographers:

“... when you dance by yourself, or you do like something on your own, you are an artist: but when you are in a choreography you're more like an artist's tool; because the choreographer is like – the art. If it was like a painting, the choreographer is the painter, and we're the paint...”

(Elmhurst student group interview @16mins 40secs)

One student suggested that the evaluation of artistry was not for the performer to make:

“I think when the public recognises you as an artist, then you're an artist.”

(Elmhurst student group interview @16mins 30secs)

For their teacher, part of the work with these young students emerging into professional life could therefore be seen to be providing space and encouragement for them to find themselves as confident performers and potential artists:

“...they get dictated to so much throughout the, the younger levels – at some point they've got to become artists... they'll finish a step and I'll say... do a pose or a... play, you've got to experiment, yourselves – to find out who you are... They need to be allowed the opportunity, the freedom to experiment – and how do you do that in a delicate way – where you don't lose control of the class, but you're still, you've got the, the fun factor; and also getting over embarrassment, because sometimes it doesn't go right; you can end up on your *derrière*, or people will laugh at you, so...”

(EP interview @11mins 30secs)

For EP watching other dancers in class and performance and analysing what students liked or disliked about someone's dancing was a crucial part of artistic education, encouraging students to learn from those artists they admired. Knitting the student experience into the professional world, familiarising them with dancers and repertoire, becomes a vital part of helping young dancers to find an artistic identity. The importance of this learning was apparent in animated discussion among the London Studio Centre musical theatre students as to the dancers they admired (LSC student group interview from 10mins 43secs). On being asked what they thought made an ideal ballet dancer their initial response was couched in terms of physical characteristics of flexibility and muscle tone. But more dancerly qualities had also impressed them: in Natalia Osipova changes of dynamic and agility; in other dancers the use of the arms and back and the seamless linkage of movement; elevation and the ability to turn in Stephen McRae. These young dancers admitted their interest and appreciation of technical accomplishment, skill, and physical attributes, accentuated through their personal experience of intensive ballet training; but in their observations one could nevertheless discern a grey area where mechanical skills overlapped with individual interpretative choices and characteristics, and technique shaded into artistry.

6.5 Social and cultural dimensions of the class

Inevitably smaller class sizes help to enable deeper more personalized work; with AG five students, with RT most often less than ten. In conversation with AG and Caroline Hutchings (CH) we speculated whether students now do more classes but less of the independent practice that might support the development of autonomous study and a sense of personal identity. CH suggested that this might be an issue in vocational schools where unsupervised practice was less encouraged these days because of health and safety regulation. The pattern of ballet teaching and learning in Britain seems to have changed over the past century from people doing fewer classes and practising, but also having private lessons; Kathrine Sorley Walker's biography of de Valois provides an interesting account of the young de Valois' intensive study with Edouard Espinosa (Sorley Walker 1998 p10). Both AG and CH were very enthusiastic about private lessons; and it seems that all of De Vos' students got a weekly private lesson with her. Beryl Grey continued regular private study with De Vos throughout her career; evidently finding both her technical and artistic support invaluable (Grey 2017).

Now with most advanced training taking place in vocational institutions which can provide students with validated qualifications and potential progression routes to dancing contracts there is less opportunity or incentive for advanced dancers to seek out independent teachers with private studio spaces for intensive study. Such classes are also at the mercy of the declining availability of affordable studio space, which makes small group and private classes unviable economically, even within commercial studio centres like DanceWorks.

However it is worth recognising the positive aspects of the group ballet class, which can through its social dimension provide emotional reinforcement and support to learners as well as alternative models of practice to learn from or emulate.

The young Latvian woman, A, taught by PC in Witney revealed in interview that her wish to do ballet was driven by images on Instagram sites such as The Ballerina Project (<http://ballerinaproject.com/about/>), which features photographs of successful professional ballet dancers such as Francesca Hayward of the Royal Ballet in romanticised ballet poses in urban settings. Coming in person to local ballet classes allowed her to follow this ambition; but also fulfilled a socialising purpose for a young woman a long way from home and family. A evidently felt comfortable with PC's warmly supportive teaching.

The social aspect of class has also over years assumed increasing salience in the adult beginners' classes I teach in Oxford. Requests to join the class are frequently couched in terms of a perception of ballet as a type of individual fitness activity; and many students already do other types of regular physical activity such as yoga, tai chi, Pilates, zumba or kettlebells. But this is not necessarily why people choose to stay and continue participating in ballet classes. For many beginners ballet is a revelation as an all-consuming holistic activity that challenges not merely the body, but the whole person, not least cognitive abilities such as memory and complex coordination (much appreciated by older class attenders), as well as providing an opportunity for sensuous response to music and expression. A proportion of women have done ballet in their youth and feel an urge to return; some have a lifelong love and admiration for ballet, and attending class as well as performances is a way to get closer to it and learn more about it.

"I've always been obsessed with ballet in every way. Erm, I did ballet between the ages of about seven and nine, and then gave it up on a whim and regretted it ever since; and have complained to my mum that she should have been more pushy with me [laughter] and get me going; and I've always gone to the ballet a lot ... I love ballet books, I love talking to people about it, and er, I didn't even realise there were adult ballet classes; and then when someone told me... it's just wonderful because it's – it's just being a little part of the ballet world, and learning more about it... you know, you've actually been a real part of the ballet world, and to be able to hear your stories and so on – is just so special..."

(C, SC adult beginners group interview @7mins 39secs)

In classes such dancers can find kindred souls with whom to share their enthusiasm, and friendships have been forged, a sense of a community of shared interest. Thus ballet classes can contribute not only to bodily health but wider mental and emotional wellbeing; and need not be the cruel and abusive environments of history. But such social benefits are not the primary drivers of my beginners' classes, they can rather be seen as highly desirable side-effects. I began to teach pragmatically to make a more stable income out of what I know and can do, and in a way that kept me practically engaged as much as possible with ballet in problematic circumstances. But an intention in these classes has been also to educate about and in ballet through its practice, and to contribute towards building a more sympathetic environment and a receptive audience for ballet and dance more widely. To that end through regular emails and blog posts I encourage class members to attend dance events in Oxford; and discussion of these shared experiences can sometimes feed directly into and inform the dancing in class.

RT's classes have provided a model of community and conversation. When classes were held in the studio at the back of his flat it became customary for those attending to congregate after in RT's tiny breakfast room for tea and chat, offering a chance to share news and reflect on ballet issues of the day, bonding a community of practice. With the move to a different studio this tradition has continued with gatherings in a local cafe, and these are deemed to be almost an integral part of the class experience.

6.6 To summarise

The purposes of the ballet class can thus be seen to be quite varied and sometimes in conflict. Within the recognisable structural progression of the class different intentions and cultural contexts shape the choice of content and influence the mode of its delivery;

in adapting to these, teachers provide very different experiences in response to a wide range of students and their evolving needs. It is therefore inappropriate to refer to the class in general terms as though one size fits all; and potentially raises questions as to claims of measurable objective standards of “correct” execution or delivery of classroom dance material.

Even in 2017 some classes could be seen to exemplify an age-old teaching tradition of the oral transmission of embodied craft knowledge, and teacher-pupil relationships more akin to the situated learning that takes place between apprentices and masters in a community of practice. However classes in regulated vocational institutions are now under pressure to greater or lesser extent to conform to the formalised assessment requirements of certified higher education qualifications (for an example of this see EP interview @36mins). While in some conservatoires the pragmatic professional assessment of potential performers through audition for the end goal of employment provides a counter-balance to more academic approaches, these latter become particularly invasive in shaping the formalised education of future ballet teachers.

It is worth restating at this point that while almost all of those I interviewed conceived of dancers as artists in the sense of performing artists, none of the teachers I interviewed specified as an explicit primary intention or responsibility of their class the development of dancers' creativity. Nevertheless some classes could be seen to provide opportunities for the cultivation of attitudes and approaches that might enable dancers to move confidently beyond the acquisition of mechanical knowledge and skills to the imaginative interpretation of the dances of others and potentially the making of dances of their own. I was struck by the comment of a young dancer at NSCD already finding a useful transfer of practice between her study of ballet and her own choreographic compositions:

“ I think being trained in ballet it helps you clean up your choreography a bit; like when I do a piece I'll go back over it – and I'll be like “what position am I in

here?" and I think if I hadn't done ballet and... – you know, and been told "ok; this has to be first otherwise it's not right" - although you don't have that in a choreographic piece I think you can definitely use it as a base layer; like a skeleton to stretch your own work on; you make your own set of rules, just like ballet's a set of rules..."

(NSCD student group interview transcript @17mins 30 secs)

But my next chapter will look at a different perspective which seems increasingly to dominate thinking about the purpose and development of the ballet class.

Chapter 7: Class for warm-up, maintenance and fitness

This chapter examines what might be seen as the fourth great aim and purpose of the ballet class; the physical preparation and development of the dancer's body for flexibility, strength, motor co-ordination and endurance, to enable the efficient and effective performance of balletic dance material. Rather than looking at the manner of delivery of teachers this focuses on the content of classes and its ordering, perhaps particularly the role and function of barre-work. While the barre-work may seem to have little to do with the development of artistic creativity, through its study one can track changes in artistic priorities and perspectives, as reflected through teachers' practical initiatives to develop relevant training. I draw on some historical examples to begin to understand how class content and structure has evolved in reflection of changing choreographic requirements and wider aesthetic and cultural pressures. The recent flowering of dance science as an offshoot from sports science and physiological research has brought scientific and sport perspectives into ballet training, and increasing focus on the idealised athletic body; raising questions as to how these may be balanced with the nurturing of artistic and communicative intentions.

7.1 Challenging the fitness of dancers

Aimed at the needs of professional and aspiring professional dancers, Dance UK's 1996 report *Fit to Dance?* ended with ten detailed recommendations for promoting their improved fitness and wellbeing, with specific responsibilities outlined for companies, schools, dancers, teachers, funding bodies and Dance UK's Healthier Dancer programme. While some of these addressed environmental conditions such as work

facilities, and more general health issues such as better nutrition and discouraging smoking, as well as the promotion of psychological wellbeing, those which perhaps had most direct relevance to and potential impact on the content and structure of the ballet class were as follows:

- 1: Dancers should be physically fitter
- 2: Dancers should warm up and cool down properly
- 6: Dancers and teachers should know more about how the body works

(Brinson & Dick 1996 pp144-152)

Irvine, Redding and Rafferty identify the following as components of fitness meriting consideration as part of “a well rounded dance training program”:

- Aerobic fitness – associated with moderate, longer-term levels of activity.
- Anaerobic fitness – associated with high intensity, maximal, short bursts of energy.
- Muscle endurance – the ability of a muscle to produce continuous movement.
- Strength – the ability of a muscle to produce a maximal force on one occasion.
- Power – the explosive (speed-related) aspect of strength.
- Flexibility – the range of motion at a joint in association with the pliability of a muscle.
- Neuromuscular coordination – associated with balance, agility, coordination and skill.
- Body composition – the make-up of body weight by percentage of muscle and fat.
- Rest – a period of no activity, to allow for recovery and regeneration.

(Irvine, Redding & Rafferty 2011 p1)

Helen Laws of industry umbrella body OneDanceUK (formerly DanceUK) and the National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science in a recent article about dance healthcare management signals the emergence of the notion of dancers as “athletic artists” since Brinson and Dick's influential report. Initially borrowing from findings from sports medicine and science, since then leading dance companies have established their own in-house teams of scientific and healthcare management staff to provide supplementary treatment and exercise and “to truly embrace a more scientific, evidence-based approach to helping dancers stay at the top of their game” (Laws 2018 p39).

Yet how do we judge dancers truly at the top of their game? Irvine, Redding and Rafferty clearly conceive of fitness as physical fitness; yet one might question to what extent this limited definition of fitness is wholly appropriate to dancers who are aspiring to be artists as well as, or rather than, athletes. Criteria for dance fitness, if defined as “fit for the purpose of dancing”, should surely include more than just physiological measures of athletic ability. If dancers are to be recognised as the artists that most of those interviewed clearly seemed to regard themselves as aiming to be or to develop into, evidence of holistic fitness for dancing should include other considerations - of artistic abilities, knowledge and skills. Perhaps prophetically, the headline subtitle at the top of Laws’ article reverses the label: “The concept of a dancer as ‘artistic athlete’ comes of age...” (Laws 2018 p39); thus aligning the ballet dancers and students at the Royal Ballet company and schools, whose healthcare management schemes the article profiles, with the gymnasts and ice skaters to whom this term is more normally applied; rather than with performing artists and interpreters in other arts disciplines.

Classes have historically been the primary means of preparation for ballet dancers to enable them to rehearse and perform. Today just over 20 years after Brinson and Dick it can appear that classes are increasingly concerned with promoting the athletic fitness of dancers, and concerns have been expressed that this can conflict with the development of dancers as potential dance artists (Speer 2010). In my field research I looked to see how the classes I observed might reflect this apparent trend; how they contribute to meeting Brinson and Dick’s recommendations in practice, and what aspects of Irvine, Redding and Rafferty’s components of fitness they might promote, considering how effectively they prepare dancers for current creative and dance performance practice. Comparing the classes observed with the recorded practices of some historic teachers - in terms of the order of exercises, their content and compositional complexity, and the amount of time spent on different sections of the

class – revealingly reflects how changing priorities and aesthetics in the evolution of ballet as a way of dancing bring about adaptations to training. Class content and format are developed to promote the necessary physical capacities to be able to meet new performance requirements; and choreographers draw on the technical innovations explored and consolidated in classes.

7.2 Class as warm-up

Brinson and Dick did not see the dance class as a warm-up or for fitness, but primarily as a locus for the learning and refinement of dance technique:

“Many dancers still believe it is a warm-up, although it will not act as one unless specifically designed to do so. Indeed, many classes are so immediately demanding that an extremely thorough warm-up beforehand is required. Class is by no means adequate fitness training, because the workload is not specific enough to train the different fitness parameters, nor is it graduated, nor tailored to individual need.”

(Brinson and Dick 1996 p122)

Judging the adequacy of the class in meeting requirements for fitness requires definition of the “fitness parameters” against which classes are to be measured, such as their relevance to the specific dances or technical elements that the class is preparing dancers to perform; as well as acknowledgement of the variety of class content over time and in differing contexts. Brinson and Dick recognised that purposes of classes may vary according to the specific needs of different participants. But historic accounts suggest that although the centre work of the ballet class has always been very much about the study and practice of a wide range of dance skills in combination, until quite recently the barre-work would seem to have been primarily conceived as body preparation and strengthening, and for many dancers it still serves that purpose.

For ballet classes happening outside institutions with their own premises, in spaces

rented by the hour in back to back schedules, there is usually little practical possibility for dancers to do a preliminary warm-up of the type recommended in the *Fit to Dance?* report before class. Of the independent spaces I went to only Danceworks had a small shared area outside the studio where a few dancers could sit on the floor stretching or mobilising joints before dancing. So for these classes to ensure safe practice for all attending, some kind of warm-up process would need to be integrated into the class itself.

While some of the classes observed incorporated elements of physical warm-up or body conditioning exercises into the conventional barre-work sequence, others provided a separate warm-up process beforehand. Anya Grinsted's class began with 25 minutes spent on 8 conditioning exercises derived from those devised by De Vos. Undertaken before conventional barre-work, these started in the centre of the room and finished with relaxed leg swings at the barre before embarking on *pliés*. With the legs in parallel gently flexing and stretching, the dancers softly swung their arms while moving the torso in all directions in rhythm with the music; bending forward and extending up and back, sideways and twisting – finding movement from the centre of the body and mobilising the core before activating turn-out of the legs for barre-work. The preparation for *pliés* marked a transition by beginning with legs in parallel and arm swings forward and back before consciously opening the legs to the first position. The conditioning seemed both gently to warm the body through movement but also to introduce a particular focus to the dancing to follow, encouraging the development of weighted natural use of the torso as the centre from which movement of the limbs might flow.

Such a thoughtful and extensive process is possible in a two-hour class; within the more usual hour and a half any introductory warm-up must inevitably be briefer if the class is to cover a balanced range of balletic material.

Roger Tully habitually book-ended his classes with balletic versions of warm-up and cool-down. He began his classes with what he calls the “preamble”, a sequence of three tiny exercises at the barre; always similar but not identical. The first two executed with the back to the barre; extending each leg in *battement tendu* sometimes with flexed foot, opening to the side or with a transfer of weight; then a sequence of leg swings to the side and across the body, variously combined with bouncing *battements piqués* and unfolding in parallel, or throwing the leg open, thus moving between turn-out and parallel. Finally with feet in 1st, 2nd or 3rd a *port de bras* with one hand on the barre incorporating outward and inward circling of the arms with body bends back, forward and side, mobilising different parts of the spine. While warming, the preamble was also about “finding” one’s self; coming into the class, marshalling concentration and coordination, and establishing the balletic *aplomb* – defined by Glasstone as “perpendicularity, poise, equilibrium” (Glasstone 2013 p6) – the central plumb line around which the body will organise itself. As with AG’s warm-up this readies the dancer mentally as well as physically for the challenges of the class to come. RT sang or whistled, usually avoiding correcting dancers while they did these three exercises; the leg swings and *port de bras* are about flow of movement rather than placing. After allegro work a relaxing *port de bras*, similarly uncommented on, followed by a formal *révérence* to the teacher, acted as a cool-down.

Eric Assandri’s class for his students at NSCD also balanced class content with both warm-up and cool-down. An opening 6 minute continuous sequence commenced in parallel facing the barre, incorporating *battements tendus*, rises, *pliés* and circling of the upper back subsequently repeated with turn-out; the class reverted to parallel at its end with a cool-down sequence bending forward and unrolling up, stretching hamstrings and calves. Laura Hussey similarly provided an opening warm-up of 4 exercises facing the barre; the first two in parallel including circling the ankles and

lunges to stretch calf muscles, as well as treading through the feet and arching and unrolling the back.

Having programmed and participated in a DanceUK Healthier Dancer workshop on warm-up and cool-down with Matthew Wyon in 1996, I became aware of the value of a gentler lead into class, and yet wanted one which would have relevance to and feed into the specifically balletic material to follow. For my own teaching of adult beginners I have developed a continuous warm-up sequence, with older dancers especially in mind, which we perform all together standing in a circle, without music but with my running commentary. Beginning with a releasing of body tensions this sequence first establishes the *aplomb* and progressively mobilises the head, shoulders and core around it. By shifting the weight and freely moving the arms we begin to locate some basic balletic *ports de bras*, and start to work through the feet ending in jogging through the space. This is all executed with the legs in parallel or natural stance; only at the end as we go to the barre are learners encouraged to open the legs in turn-out and note the inevitable shift to a more upright posture and *aplomb* that this generates. My intention here is alongside physiological preparation to introduce some fundamental technical principles and inculcate a particular way of approaching the dancing to follow; focusing intention on the movement and the geometry of the forms rather than the body of the dancer.

The types of preparatory sequences and initial barre exercises described above thus warm the body, and ready the dancer to undertake progressive analytical preparation of specific technical skills and the building of strength through the traditional barre sequence itself. Perhaps responding to the *Fit to Dance?* critique, it would seem that most teachers today are conscious of the need for careful warm-up, and where it cannot be assumed that dancers have been able to warm-up in advance, responsibly continue finding ways to incorporate it within the class format. But I would suggest that

beyond purely physiological benefits a shared introductory warm-up, however brief, potentially should also serve other important somatic, cognitive and emotional purposes for the individual and the class as a whole:

- leaving outside world concerns
- awakening the senses
- focusing the mind/concentration
- re-stating fundamental movement principles
- establishing an appropriate working environment

These can helpfully communicate to the student the approach, aims and values of the teacher underlying the dancing content to come.

7.3 Barre work for aerobic fitness and strength

The concept of a specific pre-barre warm-up nevertheless seems to be a relatively modern development, not evident in the 19th and early 20th century class structures of those extensively documented pedagogues Bournonville and Cecchetti. These show a clear purposive division, with barre work consisting of simple exercises primarily to strengthen and prepare the dancer for more dancerly and choreographic complexity in the centre. Toby Bennett writes that Cecchetti's exercises were:

“...pared to the bone and highly repetitive in order to focus on particular technical details... consisting largely of multiple repetitions... most of the barre exercises were repeated in the centre work, thus increasing their technical challenge... precise repetition predominates.”

(Bennett 2014 p99)

Cecchetti arranged his centre material into a repeatable structure of six classes for the days of the week, each with particular technical themes and a palette of related vocabulary, building through the week to culminate in the most advanced and complex *enchaînements* in the Saturday class. It appears that despite the choreographic sophistication of Cecchetti's centre-work studies, the simple repetitive barre-work

would not have been specifically related to the varied *enchaînements* to follow.

After Bournonville's death in 1879 Danish ballet master Hans Beck similarly organised Bournonville's material into a sequence of 6 classes, which were preserved through the training regime of the Royal Danish Ballet and its conservatoire. The changing requirements of a varied repertoire has meant that this work no longer predominates in company classes, although it is partially maintained in recognition of the needs of dancers performing Bournonville's ballets; and it provides valuable insight into 19th century ballet training.

Three sequences of barre-work are included in the film documenting Bournonville style classes published by the Royal Danish Ballet in 2005; a shorter barre of 7 exercises for Mondays and Thursdays, and two barre-work sequences of 9 exercises for Tuesdays and Fridays, and Wednesdays and Saturdays. Although the third barre has somewhat greater technical scope and complexity they are all three simple and unadorned in their composition, but physically challenging in their multiple repetitions of actions of the legs. There are no body bends, and many of the exercises are executed with the arms sustained in 2nd position; at only one point is an *arabesque* arm arrived at (in the third barre). Exercises are performed straight to the front *en face*, or squarely placed with two hands on the barre; although nearly every exercise ends with a *relevé* to *attitude* slightly *croisé* to the barre as a final flourish, or occasionally an extension *devant* opening away from the barre. Despite its execution on the film by today's dancers used to higher leg extensions, it is notable too that adagio elements (*grands ronds de jambe*) are usually performed with the legs at hip height or 90°, and *retirés* are placed just below the knee. There are no transfers of weight, and no alternating use of the leg by the barre; so that exercises require sustaining on one leg for lengthy periods, while the "working" leg performs multiply repeated actions; for example 16 *grands battements* in each position, or 16 continuous *ronds de jambe*, *en dehors* then *en*

dedans, à terre and *en l'air* in the Monday barre.

On the DVD a stern disclaimer advises that the Barre is unsuitable for current use:

“There are only eight exercises in the Barre and they are far too short to suit regular training methods today. Nor is the order appropriate in keeping with modern training principles, with the grand battement as the third exercise. A modern teacher would hardly recommend doing 96 grands battements. Whether they truly reflect Bournonville's own teaching method is doubtful. Today the Barre is not used for daily training purposes, but some of the individual exercises can be used within a training sequence.”

(The Bournonville School 2005, Disc 2)

Bruhn and Moore specifically singled out for criticism the short barre-work component of Bournonville classes as being insufficient to warm and prepare the body for the challenging allegro work to follow (Bruhn & Moore 2005 p 51-2). Yet it would appear that such barre-work was very much intended to promote strength and endurance through repetition of simple exercises. Ironically this could be seen to bring it closer to current advice given by Irvine, Redding and Rafferty in their paper for IADMS on improving the fitness of today's dancers; both by providing specifically targeted repetitive actions to build appropriate strength and endurance, and aerobically by reducing the intermittent nature of practice perceived in “the average dance technique class” (Irvine, Redding & Rafferty 2011 p2). As Guy Burden remarked (GB interview @28mins 40secs), when the same barre-work sequence is regularly repeated minimal time is needed between exercises to learn new combinations, and it can thus be performed continuously, to increase aerobic fitness and stamina. A benefit of this simplified concentrated barre can be to free up time for repeating and elaborating on strengthening work in the centre, and for a greater amount of jumping.

My own experience of some weeks of classes with distinguished teacher Hans Brenaa as a guest with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet in 1980 prior to a season at Covent Garden left a powerful impression as to the effect of a traditional Danish class format. Bruhn and Moore cite the example of the traditional Bournonville class barre as sometimes

being as little as 15 minutes long (Bruhn & Moore, 2005 pp51-52). Brenaa's barres were simple and short, enabling a greater proportion than normal of the one and a quarter hour company class to be spent on allegro combinations. I recall in the performance season which followed feeling far less physically taxed by the tiring *corps de ballet* work of *Swan Lake* Act 2 with its continuous passages of allegro work and running; an example of a beneficial match between class content and structure and performance needs. However I suspect that it was the additional time spent in mastering complex allegro *enchaînements* that was responsible for the enhancement of my performance, rather than the short barre.

A trend towards promoting a more continuous practice at the barre was evident in the vocational and professional classes observed (Elmhurst, London Studio Centre, Royal Academy of Dance, Royal Ballet company class, Anna du Boisson, Northern School of Contemporary Dance). Barre-work exercises were often performed continuously on both sides, and sometimes as little as 10 seconds break was needed to set or remind dancers of the following exercise. Without pausing for correction or analysis of particular technical elements the barre sequence thus became effectively more about aerobic warm-up and fitness, with inclusion of additional separate non-balletic exercises for mobilising or stretching, particularly for the feet and calves, but also relaxed leg swings to loosen the hips. In GB's class for his RAD students such exercises alternated with more conventional barre-work exercises; fast rises on two feet and one foot followed the initial *pliés*, and another set of rises changing from parallel to turn-out followed *battements tendus*, with leg swings in *attitude* sideways, forwards and back following a *rond de jambe* sequence with integrated adage.

Sometimes such elements are incorporated seamlessly into a conventional barre-work sequence. In Brian Maloney's class for The Royal Ballet, despite starting straight in with *grands pliés* the first *battement tendu* exercise ended with a sequence in parallel

with the body rolling down and up, treading through the feet and then rising through a *demi-plié* on *demi-pointe* to balance in parallel. The danced action was interrupted for stretching as dancers took a graceful *port de bras* in the forward bend and then gripped their ankles for a more extreme stretch of the hamstrings (RB World Ballet Day 2014 @4mins 9 secs - 7mins). Later an extended lyrical sequence at the end of *ronds de jambes* similarly became a 16 count phrase of personal stretching rather than a classical *port de bras*. The insertion of loose high leg swings (nearly all over 90°) combined with full height *retirés* early in the barre among the *battement tendus* seemed surprisingly reminiscent of the 19th century inclusion of *grands battements* at this point, deemed to be in conflict with “modern training principles” (The Bournonville School 2005, Barre-work disclaimer Disc 2).

Another variant on the incorporation of fitness exercises into a ballet class was the inclusion by Anna du Boisson of a 10 minute floor-work sequence of stretching and strengthening on yoga mats after the barre (AduB class @40-50mins). This included a “bum stretch” sitting cross-legged; a developing sequence of sit-ups; lying back propped on the elbows and lifting the pelvis; press-ups (allowing a range of personal variants); lying on the front and arching the upper back; sitting with legs extended wide with body bends to side and forward; and finally a stretch of each dancer's choice. AduB had introduced this into the class in response to what she perceived as a need for freelance dancers to be able to develop and maintain greater muscular strength. The continuous routine is obviously set and known to regular attenders, and is now done every class.

These changes suggest that many have bought into the notion promoted by the Healthier Dancer programme that ballet classes do not build either enough muscular strength or endurance for the dancing required of today's performers. On the Royal Opera House website Brian Maloney is listed as a member of the large Royal Ballet

Healthcare and Fitness Staff - a team of 19 people which includes physiotherapists, Pilates and Gyrotonics instructors, masseurs, an occupational psychologist, a dietician and three sports scientists, under its Clinical Director of Ballet Healthcare. The company view would seem to be that the ballet class is no longer regarded as an adequate maintenance practice. This is also now being evidenced by Royal Ballet School policy which, with the intention of developing future dancers as “artistic athletes”, will be setting sports science goals for students, and from next year be taking 50 minutes a week out of ballet classes to concentrate on “tailored strength and conditioning work” (Laws 2018 p40). Teachers more widely can be seen to be responding to concerns as to the fitness of dancers attending their classes in a variety of ways, making changes in structure and content, which may today be reflecting their awareness of the debate driven by the growing field of dance science research and bodies such as the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS).

But this raises the question of defining the primary focus of barre-work; whether its purpose is simply physical fitness, or the development of technical understanding and fundamental mechanical and physical skills in preparation for more complex dance material in the centre. I concur with Anna Paskevskaja, who outlines the guiding principles behind ballet class structure in her thoughtful discussion of evolving ballet technique, drawing attention to the vital connection between barre-work and centre practice:

“The ballet class has a prescribed structure that allows a full experience of the vocabulary at each lesson. This structure encourages the reiteration of specific precepts that govern the execution of the vocabulary, such as alignment, weight transference, opposition, and use of turn-out. The experience of motions at the barre is applied to the understanding of the vocabulary in the center in the adagio and allegro sections of the class. In other words, this structure provides the opportunity for students to make connections and understand...”

(Paskevskaja 2005, p9)

In this conception the selection and arrangement of barre-work exercises would seem to be not just about the development of generic fitness and strength but importantly

related to the vocabulary to be learned and practised in the centre, providing opportunities for analysis and preparation of specific elements of the dancing to come. Thoughtful construction of the barre-work content, following the gradual development of material from basic actions to their manifestation in complex co-ordinations, should facilitate relevant and appropriate physical warm-up of the dancer's body through the process of dancing.

Historical accounts from the 19th century onwards provide evidence of the lengthening and elaboration of barre-work. Such changes reflect not simply a desire to develop greater physical fitness, but relate to a progressive evolution of ballet skills and changing aesthetic and artistic priorities; thus the structure and content of the class being influenced by choreographers' innovations but also wider cultural trends and fashions. The next section examines the changing balance of the class content between barre and centre-work, and considers its consequences for the education of dancers.

7.4 The evolving structure of class

Tracing the development of the structure of the ballet class through the documented practice of selected historic teachers, and comparing their practices with those of teachers I observed, demonstrates the gradual move from simple strengthening to longer exercises and more variety of content at the barre. While this could be seen as advantageous in terms of providing a more refined and comprehensive technical preparation, it arguably takes time away from study and practice of *enchaînements* to be danced in the centre, perhaps therefore contributing to skewing the priority of classes away from dancing and more towards the refinement of the body.

In the 1960s Bruhn and Moore expressed a concern that the short Bournonville barre, was insufficient to warm the body for the challenging allegro work to follow (Bruhn & Moore 2005 pp 51-2); and this can be seen as part of a growing belief over the 20th century that such brief simple barres were inadequate preparation for ballet's changing technical demands. Of the classes I observed the length of barre-work ranged from a circumstantially truncated 20 minute warm-up at the RAD through to nearly an hour at London Studio Centre (as part of a two hour class), with advanced vocational or professional standard class barres coming in at between approximately 30 and 45 minutes in length (up to half of a one and a half hour class).

It was evident that today's barre-work exercises are in general more “choreographic”, incorporating practice of a greater number of variants to their basic components, with greater use of the arms and body movement, and more sophisticated combinations of elements in movement phrases, rather than simple repetitions of basic actions.

Contrast the utterly simple sustained single *battement tendu en croix* exercise of the Bournonville first barre with the three *battement tendu* exercises of Brian Maloney's class, which incorporated changes of speed, transfers of weight forward, side and back, *battements en cloche* and finishing in *demi-plié*, in 16 count combinations which were reversed, and then followed by two further *battements glissés* exercises (RB class transcript @4mins-8mins 50secs & 11mins 38secs- 14mins 30secs). Growing requirements for higher leg extensions and greater flexibility have led to the inclusion of expansive adagios and stretching sequences sometimes with the leg on the barre, performed as lyrical adagios in their own right rather than as purely functional bodywork. A survey of some of the texts of major historic pedagogues enables the tracing of these adaptations over time, revealing a dialectic between simple strengthening through repetition and greater choreographic complexity, between the barre as physical training or preparatory study of dancing. I have chosen to look at classes of individual teachers included as examples in their pedagogic texts, rather

than set classes fixed within a teaching system derived from such teachers.

Nadine Nicolaeva-Legat writing in 1947 quotes from the great teacher Nicolas Legat's diary, writing about teaching the "Class of Perfection" at the Maryinsky that he inherited from his teacher the revered Christian Johanssen at the turn of the 19th century:

"In this class of artists the bar work was short, serving only as warming-up exercises, and the part of greatest interest was in the centre."

(Nicolas Legat cited in Nicolaeva-Legat 1947 p9)

It is worth noting that this class, attended regularly by such established artists as Preobrajenska, Karsavina, Egorova, Vaganova and occasionally by Kshesinskaya, Trefilova and the young Lydia Kyasht as well as Fokine, Nijinsky and Adolph Bolm, and immediately followed by a similar class for dancers from the corps de ballet, was only an hour long; and seems to have included within this time for dancers to dance their variations for Legat's correction, feedback and sometimes modification.

The appendix to Nicolaeva-Legat's book includes three examples of Legat's classes which indicate a three part structure to classes, divided into exercises at the barre, in the centre, and allegro; with a roughly equal number of exercises given for each section. The first class lists 10 barre-work exercises, 9 centre practice combinations and no fewer than 18 allegro *enchaînements*. The "ladies" changed into pointe shoes after *petit allegro*, thereafter there being a distinction between exercises for men and women until a final exercise combining *grands battements* and *petits changements* performed all together before the *révérence*. It is hard to see how all of the material given could have been accommodated within one short class; it is probable that Nicolaeva-Legat is including related exercises and variants. The barre-work exercises as in the Bournonville barre are uncomplicated, simple and repetitious; however it is notable that all the barre elements are subsequently executed in more elaborately choreographed combinations in the centre. I remember such "centre practice" as a substantial and challenging part of the RAD examination syllabus work that I learned

during the 1960s and early 1970s; but am aware that current classes seem often to include less of this, with more centre time spent on *pirouette* combinations and adage studies; perhaps in line with the current demands for more acrobatic high extensions and facility for multiple turns that dancers in Anya Grinsted's and Anna du Boisson's classes identified.

Agrippina Vaganova's *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet* first appeared in 1934, and over the years was widely disseminated, first being translated into English by Anatole Chujoy in 1946, but also into German, Spanish, Polish, Czech and Hungarian among other languages. Technically brilliant, she remained frustrated by her career as a dancer at the Imperial Theatre which ended in 1916; she became increasingly dissatisfied with what she saw as the archaic affectation of the French derived school that she had studied as a pupil of Johanssen and later Legat and Gerdt (Chistyakova in Vaganova 1969 p vii). She was however highly respectful of the Italian virtuosity and methodically organised teaching of Cecchetti. Her life's work became her quest to consolidate a Russian teaching practice that would draw on the best of the other schools but with a uniquely Russian character; and by the end of the 1920s her teaching was beginning to turn out dancers with a discernible performance style:

“Vaganova sought from her pupils emotional expressiveness, strictness of form and a resolute energetic manner of performance. The dancing of Vaganova's pupils corresponded to the very essence of Soviet ballet as an art of great meaning, lofty lyricism and heroic spirit.”

(Chistyakova in Vaganova 1969 pxi)

While the theoretical content of her book is organised thematically around families of steps, it does end with a sample class including music, which gives a sense of the uncompromising technical accomplishment required for her more advanced classes. The order of the barre-work exercises is what most would recognise today as standard, beginning with *pliés* and finishing with *grands battements*. Combinations in the centre while of challenging difficulty are relatively short, but repeated and some reversed. But even preparing for material of this level of challenge it would seem that the barre-work

remained simple in its combinations, with multiple repetitions for strength. In her introductory chapter on the construction of a lesson Vaganova makes a strong defence of simplicity, of exercises even “tedious in their monotony”, advocating “...systematic repetitions of the same movement a great number of times in succession”; insisting especially for more elementary pupils on mastery of the movements before they are allowed to combine them in varied *enchaînements*. The clear intention being a preliminary training of the body:

“In these classes a foundation is laid for the development of the muscles, the elasticity of the ligaments: a basis is instilled for the elementary movements.”
(Vaganova 1969 p15)

Class pianist Kyoko Murakami who played for Soviet teachers in Japan in the 1980s gives interesting insight that confirms a clear priority in Russian classes on physical training rather than artistry, quoting Krasovskaya:

“... artistry does not come in until things get together for rehearsal. They do not call it ‘ballet class’, called it ‘classical dance’ for the system of the pure movement of body’ which make a clear distinction to total art on stage, ‘ballet’.”
(Krasovskaya in Bazarova 1987, cited in Murakami 2003 p20)

In teaching his dancers at New York City Ballet decades later Balanchine clearly saw the purpose of barre-work in this light, and the importance of repetition in ensuring that such technical facility might be cultivated and absorbed to the point of automaticity:

“We did very simple, elementary exercises many, many times, until the movement was not only exact but even “automatic”... making the elements of good technique “automatic” in us made it hard for us to dance any other way.”
(Schorer 1999 p49)

While Vaganova was refining and establishing her methods in Leningrad, in Moscow alongside performing the young Asaf Messerer was beginning a teaching career which would culminate in legendary status as the teacher of such stars as Galina Ulanova, Rudolph Nureyev, Maya Plisetskaya and Ekaterina Maximova. His manual aimed at teachers and dancers, *Classes in Classical Ballet*, first appeared in 1967, with an English translation by Oleg Briansky published in London in 1976. The book opens

with Messerer's own account of the development of his career and pedagogic thinking and an outline of his guiding principles; the main body consists of detailed verbal notation of six classes for advanced professional dancers, liberally illustrated with photographic sequences featuring dancers of the Bolshoi Ballet.

Messerer gives insight into the practice of two influential teachers which shaped him as a dancer, Alexander Gorsky and Vasily Tikhomirov. For both of these barre-work was a simple warm-up. Tikhomirov's class, attended by both male and female company dancers, seems to have only lasted 45 minutes; but as performed "with almost no interruption" and with an emphasis on "flowing from one movement to the next", Messerer seems to have found these beneficial despite their brevity, and was "astounded" that some dancers chose not to do them (Messerer 1976 p19).

Messerer's own classes as documented are described by Elena Golubkova (who devised the system for documenting the classes used in the book) as lasting an hour or somewhat longer, with the barre coming in at 15 to 20 minutes in length. Similarly to Cecchetti he seems to have organised them around "choreographic" themes for the differing days of the week: the first class on:

"...the pas assembles, the second class is built on *sissonnes*; the third class on *cabrioles*; the fourth on *pas jetés*; the fifth on *pas de basques*, *sauts de basques* and *pas ciseaux*, and the sixth on combinations of all the different movements stressed during the week."

(op.cit. p26)

It is worth noting that these themes are all elements of allegro vocabulary, suggesting an importance accorded to jumping within the Bolshoi culture. A believer in proper planning, but also in the freedom of the teacher to develop their own approach while adhering to fundamental principles, Messerer lays out his unvarying barre order as follows:

"... exercise at the barre starts with deep *grands pliés*, *grands pliés* in first, second and fifth positions, followed by *battements tendus*, *battements tendus demi-pliés*, *battements tendus jetés*, *ronds de jambe à terre* in combination with *port de bras* and *battements relevés lents*, *battements fondus*, *battements frappés*, *ronds de jambe en l'air* (sometimes this exercise is done in

combination with the previous movement) adagio with different *développés*, *battements doubles frappés*, *petits battements sur le cou-de-pied*, and *grands battements jetés*.”

(op.cit. p24)

As exemplified in the classes documented typical barre-work exercises consisted of short simple phrases *en croix*, but reversed, with some repeated on the *demi pointe* for additional strength and challenge. They are supplemented by three further exercises facing the barre after *grands battements*; a simple *port de bras* of body bends, stretching with the leg on the barre, and *relevés*. So this barre format can be seen already to be potentially longer, fuller and more complex, enabling practice of a wider variety of actions. Messerer was also not in favour of the endless repetition of exercises for learning difficult movements, which he saw as potentially leading to overstraining and serious injury. Conscious that the dancers he was working with had heavy performance and rehearsal schedules, he saw the need “to ease the muscular burden and not overdo matters in class, to avoid unnecessarily tiring the dancers, thereby diminishing the value of the study period.” (ibid. 24). The designation of class as a “study period” implies that the class was intended as more than simply a physical warm-up or repetition of the known.

In the centre, following a small adage which might include full *pliés*, the sequence of the barre-work exercises from *battements tendus* on was repeated but also further elaborated: “All these exercises can be developed in different combinations interlaced with pirouettes, finishing in small and grand poses.” (ibid. p25). Jumping *enchaînements* started small and got larger, faster and more complex in combination of elements; to be followed by pointe-work for the women; and the class wound down with all dancers doing little *changements* with *grands battements* and a final *port de bras* with body bends. Thus Messerer's classes can be seen as exemplifying a format recognisable in most advanced classes today. But in their variety and content can also be identified a primary focus on the mastering of an extensive vocabulary, and

strengthening geared specifically to the exploration and performance of those movements rather than developing generic fitness. The barre is therefore conceived of as not just about strength and warm-up, but the analytical practising of skills and development of practical knowledge.

British teacher and dance historian Joan Lawson, who published a number of volumes on ballet pedagogy, would also seem clearly to conceive of the class as a place for the development of technical knowledge and capability. Having trained in the UK with Margaret Morris and Serafina Astafieva, she later studied in both Moscow and Leningrad, doing classes with Vaganova and Messerer among others; and therefore saw herself as emerging from Russian schooling. Particular areas of interest and expertise in her teaching included the development of young dancers from childhood through adolescence, and also the remedial work that she later did helping dancers back from injury. Her book *The Ballet Class: Principles and Practice* published in 1984 spans work from young students through to professionals, with photographic images of a range of students including young dancers from the Royal Ballet who would have studied with her; it presents 18 sample classes organised around six themes.

Lawson's research as a historian into the writings of John Weaver had kindled an interest in the anatomical basis of the actions of the dancing body, which led her to seek scientific corroboration of ballet's technical knowledge from medical authorities (Lawson 1988 pvii). Throughout she is insistent on the need for teachers to have working knowledge of human anatomy as it relates to the principles of classical dance.

Emerging from this more scientific perspective Lawson chooses as themes broader concepts and underlying mechanical principles of ballet technique, rather than elements of vocabulary as in Messerer's classes. Each theme is addressed in classes pitched respectively at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels; thus stance, turn-out, placing, laws of balance, transfer of weight and "the rules", with coordination

being seen as a seventh underlying principle and connecting thread:

“Each exercise also involves several other principles because it is impossible to isolate one from the others and expect a line of dance to emerge. Nevertheless, when explaining my ways of teaching I have always tried to concentrate on one principle only during a single class in order to draw attention to the part it must play in all dance movements. In this way the most important Principle – Co-ordination – has been covered. Without it there can be no feeling for the line of dance drawn by the performer's whole body to fill the space in which it moves, nor will the performer reveal how the movements are phrased to cover the whole stage and timed to become one with the music.”

(Lawson 1988 pvii)

The classes are intended to last between one hour and one hour and 15 minutes; the basic order given implies a half and half split between the barre and the centre-work. The barre comprises 9 exercises: *pliés*, *battements tendus*, *battements glissés*, *ronds de jambe à terre*, *grands battements*, *battements frappés*, *petits battements*, *adage*, and finally practice for pointework or stretching. Centre-work comprises 9 further exercises; starting with two “*petits adages*” relating to the first five exercises of the barre-work, a *grand adage* which draws on the later more complex barre-work exercises; then *pirouettes*; then four allegro studies, two *petits* and two *grands allegros*, beginning from simple warm-up jumps on two feet and developing through beaten steps to large complex jumps turning in the air. The final exercise in more advanced classes provides an opportunity to do steps of virtuosity such as turns *en diagonale* or *en manège*, or *tours en l'air* for the boys. In the elementary classes however, these are replaced by a *port de bras*, “in tribute to my many Russian teachers who always ended thus.” (op.cit p25). In this evenly divided class we see exemplified an evolved conception of the barre-work not so much as physical warm-up and strengthening, but as integrally related to the study of dancing material in the centre; designed to prepare the dancer to perform very specific skills required by advanced vocabulary and *enchaînements*.

From these examples we can see in the design of barre-work by the teacher a tension between the need for physical strengthening through simple and repeated exercises,

and the development of understanding through material choreographed to illustrate and refine particular complex movement skills as a preparation for advanced dancing. The more time spent on generic strength and fitness exercises the less time is available for more detailed study of the vocabulary, how it is affected by its arrangement in different contexts and relationships, and consequently its potential adaptation to address differing stylistic priorities and creative combinations. The short simple barres of 19th century classes enabled longer time to be spent on this via the dancing combinations which followed in the centre. Today's longer barres can enable useful preparatory analytical work in order to ensure safer dance practice. But the inclusion of athletic body conditioning elements, or too much choreographic complexity at the barre can take valuable time away from exploring the experience of dancing in the centre; and arguably does not develop the subtly nuanced strength needed for mastery and generation of ballet's technical complexity.

7.5 Some notable changes

The following two examples demonstrate how changes in class priorities and structure potentially relate not simply to developing physical fitness and strength but to aesthetic and stylistic priorities emerging in choreography for performance. In the detail of classroom *enchaînements* and their ordering and relationship within the class, one can begin to discern differing artistic values; and therefore potential choices open not only to teachers in their devising of technical studies, but also to dancers in their manner of interpretation of ballet's dance material. This shows how the historic dialectic between promoting dancer's physicality, or increasing experiential knowledge of and familiarity with ballet's vocabulary and movement principles, continues to be evident in the current class practice I observed.

An observable development over the years has been the progressive inclusion of *ports de bras* with body bends as part of the barre-work; now a standard part of *plié* combinations, frequently appended onto *ronds de jambe à terre*, occasionally included in adage at the barre, and part of stretching exercises. As noted these are almost entirely absent from the 19th century barre sequences of Bournonville and Cecchetti, or the short barres of Legat and Vaganova. They appear in Messerer's classes as part of slow stretching at the end of the barre, and can be seen throughout the barre of de Valois's syllabus class from the 1960s responding to the needs of Ashton's choreography (Cave & Worth 2012, DVD Track 2).

However, according to Suki Schorer Balanchine clearly saw the focus of the barrework as being elsewhere:

"The purpose of barre work, according to Balanchine, is primarily to develop the dancer's skill and finesse in the use of the feet and legs... he directed the major part of his comments and corrections at the barre to those aspects of technique involving the feet and legs so we could focus maximum attention, energy and awareness on them."

(Schorer 1999 p49)

Arms were kept very simply held, exercises were all performed squarely placed *en face* without the introduction of changes of body direction in relation to the barre, and *ports de bras* only occasionally introduced to bring attention to specific sensations of movement:

"Because the *ports de bras* we did at the barre were not part of a daily routine repeated by rote, without a particular purpose, they had not grown stale from too-frequent and unaware repetition. They were made part of certain exercises for very specific reasons, and we did them with awareness of the skill to be developed."

(ibid. p50)

By contrast Roger Tully's barre included a constant focus on the use of the body and the carriage of the arms. Body bends in flowing movement were part of the preamble; followed *grands pliés* in each position; and were performed as a separate sequence after *ronds de jambe* to prepare *à terre* the body movements that will be needed when

the legs are lifted for *adage*. This study came in addition to *port de bras* as the first exercise in the centre, and again as the last of the class. As in Anya Grinsted's De Vos inspired work, the integrated mobilisation of the torso and development of *épaulement* through *port de bras* take a far more prominent place in the technical conception of classwork. It is hard to find conclusive documentary evidence for the root of this different approach, but I speculate that it comes in part from the influence of the freedom of movement of Isadora Duncan on Fokine and dancers of the Ballets Russes such as Karsavina, whose sample classes preserved by the Royal Academy of Dance include imaginative and expressive *port de bras* studies. Dawn Lille Horwitz' evocative description of classes with Fokine in New York in the 1920s and 30s make clear his priorities of developing coordination and flow, and the involvement of the whole body, as opposed to the isolation of actions of the legs:

“Every step had to be done with a flow that was based on natural movement and involved the entire body, never a part in isolation.... To him, dance meant a beautiful line – one that was long and unbroken. This continuous line or shape was a complete body movement, coordinated and harmonious from all sides, and involving a sense of outward flow and inward feeling.”

(Horwitz 1979 pp39-42)

Both De Vos and Kathleen Crofton, Roger Tully's teacher, danced with Pavlova, who so inspired Ashton; and Anya Grinsted is convinced of the relevance and value of De Vos' approach to dancers engaging with the fluid body movement of Ashton's choreography. It would appear that De Vos' and Crofton's classes prioritised the involvement of the whole body rather than the isolation of the limbs; and the combination of elements of vocabulary to form choreographed phrases of movement, rather than the perfecting of those elements in isolation to meet a standardised academic definition. Their teaching would seem to reflect Fokine's choreographic priorities, diverging from the evolving more virtuosic schooling of Vaganova, and from the adherence of Balanchine in teaching to his Russian classical roots.

De Vos and Crofton were against the systematization of their teaching, preferring oral

transmission. Thus records of their class work material tend to be sparse and anecdotal, their practice living on precariously and often unidentified through its embodiment in their pupils. Without more extensive documentation it would be hard to make detailed comparison.

The order of class work can also begin to reveal the range of teaching objectives which might colour a teacher's choice in the composition of an exercise. It becomes possible to discern distinct pedagogic and qualitative intentions in the contextual placement of particular movements; their combination with other elements, their place within the evolving classwork structure. The action of the *grand battement* is a throw generated from underneath the leg, rather than a lift. Executed thus its purpose is therefore less about developing strength through lifting and more about accessing mobility in turn-out, also for practising the explosive and dynamic extensions needed to propel the dancer into the air for *grand allegro*. In Lawson's classes *grands battements* appear half way through the barre-work sequence, earlier than is the now almost universally accepted Russian practice of executing these at the end of the barre-work. Lawson uses the *grand battement* as a technical training device emerging from smaller *battements* and developing particular skills in line with the chosen theme of each class; thus each class provides a precise variant of the action with a relevant challenge. By contrast it would appear that *grands battements* at the beginning of class in simple repetition served in the Cecchetti and Bournonville classes a primary purpose as a warm up exercise to mobilise the hip joint in turn-out while maintaining a stable centre; thus not unlike the more relaxed leg swings incorporated by Anya Grinsted, Guy Burden and Brian Maloney, or in Roger Tully's preamble. Usually the leg height of these would reach a maximum of hip height or an angle of 90°, although in the case of the highly flexible bodies of the Royal Ballet dancers legs reach greater heights.

For Roger Tully *grands battements* represented “the summation of the barre”; in which

the dancer brings together all the skills so far practised in coordinated strength and dynamism, ready to leave the barre and dance independently in the space, and in preparation for *grand allegro*. But moving *grands battements* to the end of the barre sequence, grouping it with other exercises requiring larger leg movements such as *adage* and stretching, can also suggest that the purpose of the exercise has become transformed from its earlier one of preliminary warm-up and conditioning, to pushing the limits of flexibility for higher extensions in *adage*.

The incorporation of stretching at the barre and the photographs that illustrate both Messerer's book and Suki Schorer's comprehensive documentation of Balanchine technique, showing female dancers with extended legs almost invariably well over 90°, often at expansive heights of around 135°, suggest the emergence of new priorities in the ballet class. From developing the aerobic fitness and muscle endurance required for Bournonville's sustained continuous allegro combinations more attention begins to be focused on preparing dancers to achieve and sustain the high leg extensions now required by partnered adage, the hyperextensions of today's neoclassical repertoire as exemplified in works by Forsythe and McGregor, or travelling leaps and lifts to fill large stage spaces. Anna du Boisson in interview revealed that she habitually incorporated a stretch at the barre before *adage* and *grands battements* in order to facilitate execution of these exercises to today's expected standards of height of leg (AduB interview @ 3mins 22secs).

This example suggests that, to prepare dancers to meet recent choreographic trends, classes for aspiring professionals must increasingly focus on cultivating streamlined bodies with aerodynamic muscular lines that enhance the dancer's perceived "aesthetic competence", here particularly extreme extension and lift of the legs. In an approach similar to the training and competition practice of aesthetic sports of gymnastics and ice skating, measurable criteria of achievement in a limited range of

standardised virtuosic elements can now be applied. This model from aesthetic sports suggests that the investigation of the activity of dancers and its dissemination in sports science research has increasing influence on current teaching; and other such challenges to traditional practices have emerged.

7.6 Challenging the structure

Very recent discussion has questioned whether the longer more elaborately choreographed barre work with less repetition of simple basic actions prevalent today potentially sabotages the development of strength and aerobic fitness in dancers. A provocatively titled article by Emma Sandall in Dance Magazine, 'Is Ballet Class Outdated?' challenges the "overall efficiency of the ballet class" asking "...whether dancers' time and energy can be better managed?" (Sandall 2018, p34). Here suggestions for change to the structural organisation of the class come not from pedagogic research within ballet but from investigations in sports and dance science. Sandall cites Brazilian researchers proposing re-ordering the dance content in the centre of class to promote greater cardiorespiratory fitness, by alternating allegro and adagio work (Rodrigues-Krause, Krause & Reischak-Oliveira 2015). Matthew Wyon, Professor of Dance Science at the University of Wolverhampton has also advocated "periodisation" for dancers, similar to that used in elite sports training; varying the lengths of time spent on components in successive classes as part of a longer term strategy for the development of optimal fitness and prevention of injury (Wyon 2014 pp111-118).

This highly planned strategy may be possible if implemented over the length of a structured full-time training course or for a permanent company; yet in interview experienced conservatoire teacher Errol Pickford was forthright in his objection to such externally driven interference with the traditional logical structure of the class:

“It's confusing the kids, it's undermining the ballet teachers, because, and the kids are now going “I'll do it today – but I won't do it tomorrow, and I'll do it the next day” - 'cos a lot of that ethos is like that, don't do it every day, one day on, one day off, one day – and now they're confused; and they don't realise they should be pushing themselves more than this. Because you are - it is carefully structured and layered, the preparation of a class; you are warm and you're sweating, you're fine; you're not in pain... “

(EP interview @25mins 3secs)

The application of periodisation to independent classes catering to a project oriented professional culture, with shifting attendance and the need to accommodate the variety of teachers' and learners' uses and aims, would be highly problematic. Interfering with the gradual progressive development of dance material ensuring that dancers are led safely from simple to more challenging material, periodisation also would seem not to consider the deep learning potentially embedded within the sequencing of choreographed *enchaînements* and the ordering of the class as a whole, the subliminal relationship and connection between elements of vocabulary and their gradual build-up.

EP was in general sceptical as to the benefits of a more fitness-oriented approach to dance training drawing on the practice of elite athletes:

“...you know it's great for rehabilitation, when you've got injured it will get you back on your feet, but you can never replace – you know, a *sauté* – can never – other than physically standing and doing it...”

(EP interview @ 25mins 50 secs)

He also perceived a conflict between the muscular athletic physicality promoted by supplementary gym work, and the streamlined body aesthetic of the highly trained ballet dancer, acquired gradually over years through class training; ultimately it was this look that the potential employers of his students were seeking.

Other researchers have also questioned the benefits of working at the barre in terms of its contribution to developing strength and posture. Sandall cites Virginia Wilmerding whose investigations suggest “...that postural responses for balance may not be well trained at the barre” (Wilmerding & Krasnow 2011 p286). This and other accusations

are part of a presentation given by Wilmerding and Krasnow at the International Symposium on Performance Science in 2011, provocatively entitled “Dance pedagogy: Myth versus reality”, whose clear assumption would seem to be that much of the accumulated experiential knowledge of ballet teachers is myth by contrast with the reality that is dance science:

“The technique of ballet, as codified and practised in a class or studio, was developed at a time when biomechanical and kinesiological principles of movement were poorly understood. Misconceptions then became part of the ritual of dance class and dance training, passing from generation to generation. An important concern here is that such misinformation may lead to injury and decreased aesthetic performance. In recent years, advances in biomechanical analyses have allowed dance researchers to “see” what is occurring during skill execution. In many cases, the instructions given during a dance class do not match biomechanical reality.”

(Wilmerding & Krasnow 2011 p283)

There are indeed some fundamental and long debated differences in opinion as to the optimal placement of the dancer's body weight, which would benefit from more open discussion. However in the bibliography that accompanies this presentation it appears that the only dance pedagogical text that has been consulted is Joan Lawson's *Teaching Young Dancers* from 1975; if there has been research by methodical enquiry into the intentions or pedagogy of current teachers, or into the historical evolution of ballet's technique and training methods, there is little evidence provided of what this may have revealed. This does not prevent the authors from making sweeping statements and assumptions about teachers and classes without reference to any supporting evidence or critical discussion of class practice that they may have either witnessed or experienced, its context or place within a particular tradition of style or schooling. Their statement above suggests that their biomechanical analyses are based on a viewer's outside visual perspective, rather than taking into account somatic and phenomenological knowledge in the practice of dancers and teachers, or the artistic and cultural contexts in which they are framing their work. A biomechanical perspective is thus highly contestable, a biased and limited representation of a multifaceted phenomenon rather than an ultimate truth.

Despite their specific critiques Wilmerding and Krasnow end by acknowledging that “...the pedagogical principles that form the basis of the standard ballet class can be regarded as solid and safe.” (Wilmerding & Krasnow 2011 p288). They concede that the ordering of the class in its development of tasks and material from slow to fast, stable base to less stable, supported (at the barre) to unsupported, and simple to complex has a beneficial logic, that in conjunction with a gradual warm-up process, can enable a progressive and productive development of both skill and physical capacity.

As Sue Mayes, principal physiotherapist of the Australian Ballet says:

“Class is a really lovely progression from that... It starts slow and small and builds to the more extreme ranges. Even the jumps start small and progress. Ballet class is a beautiful way to build the body towards the challenging repertoire of a professional dancer.”

(Mayes cited in Australian Ballet 2018)

This sentiment echoes in the testimonies of modern dancers who continue to incorporate ballet class or at least barre-work into their training, identifying ballet “as beneficial for maintenance”, as “medicine” or “vitamins” (dancers comments cited by Nettl-Fiol in Bales and Nettl-Fiol eds. 2008 p168). This within a contemporary training culture that Bales and Nettl-Fiol describe as “bricolage”:

“...the layering of disparate practices upon one another within the dancer-body, such as a classic Western form (ballet) with an ancient Eastern practice (yoga), reflecting postmodern “radical juxtaposition” through a training agenda styled and structured by the interests of the independent dancer.”

(Bales & Nettl-Fiol 2008 pp2-3)

The training needs of many of today's dancers can be seen to be less defined by the authoritative teacher than, in a shifting world of variable project working, by dancers themselves. In this context ballet class takes its place within a range of available body techniques and fitness regimens, directed at preparing the dancer to be able to perform a wide range of styles and skills; the class therefore viewed less as induction into a particular conception of dancing, and more as a training for general dancerly fitness and to acquire an ideal body.

Thus current debate about the purpose of the ballet class, within the professional community but also increasingly in a wider context, would seem to be predominantly from a perspective of its efficacy as physical training, rather than its relation to ballet as a theatrical art form. Rather than exploring ballet's extensive vocabulary of dancing actions and the variable ways in which they might be performed in ever shifting combination, classes are pressured to focus on enabling dancers to meet accepted physical norms reinforced through widely propagated photographic and video imagery.

7.7 Ballet online: fitness and lifestyle

Pat Clapton's adult pupil A is one of many who find ballet's current gymnastic body aesthetic seductive. Her live engagement with ballet class as an activity is both driven and supplemented by her interest in ballet online. Originally motivated to take action by the glamorous still images of the Instagram site The Ballerina Project, A's aspirational ideal of beauty as derived from these role models is very much defined in the physical terms of today's elegantly slim, sleek ballet body, with toned musculature and hyper-flexibility. She uses YouTube not for watching dance performances, companies or films, but as a source of online ballet training offering exercise programmes to follow to help her achieve the admired ballerina body; such as Ballet Beautiful, "a ballet-inspired fitness method and lifestyle brand" fronted by professional ballet dancer Mary Helen Bowers:

"Ballet Beautiful brings the artistry and athleticism of ballet, fashion and glamour into everyday life. Built upon the rich history of classical ballet, Ballet Beautiful offers a fresh and uniquely artistic approach to exercise, well being and health... Inspired by a dancer's daily training, every exercise, stretch and movement in Ballet Beautiful is designed to build strength, grace and flexibility. Targeted toning, barre and cardio exercises sculpt sleek powerful ballet muscles, dance experience not required."

(BalletBeautiful.com)

Bowers' ten years with New York City Ballet, and training of Natalie Portman for her

starring role in the international blockbuster film *Black Swan*, gives a seal of authenticity to a programme which encourages the public to subscribe and sign up for online exercises and social media updates, or buy merchandise such as exercise DVDs and dancewear. Despite creation of an online community and the chance to join open classes in New York, this is effectively ballet by distance learning, to be undertaken unsupervised in the limited private space of a home environment. The recent publications of American ballerina Misty Copeland similarly promulgate ballet as a self improvement and fulfilment agenda; encouraging readers not just to improve their bodies through healthy eating and ballet based exercises, but thereby to empower themselves and build their self confidence (Copeland 2017).

Do these sorts of resources peddle a lie? Copeland's toned and stylishly photographed idealised body has taken years of dedication and full time hard work, in the form of traditional ballet training in classes with experienced teachers, to arrive at; setting an impossible standard for most women to achieve. Such texts and online resources potentially generate a significant new source of income for the dance economy; nonetheless their aspirational messages, tying in with wider public discourse around the desirability of the fit and healthy body as defined by elite sports practice, also powerfully shape public perceptions of ballet as an art form and expectations of what will be seen in performance.

Fardouly, Willburger and Vartanian's recent paper paints a disturbing picture of the potential distorting influence of social media on young women's body image concerns and self-objectification (Fardouly et al. 2017). Their research tracks how use of the Instagram platform can lead to the internalization of societal ideals of beauty, and self dissatisfaction arising from the innate drive in people to compare themselves with others; exacerbated by the availability of tools to edit and enhance images creating unrealistic expectations. They draw particular attention to the prevalence of

“fitspiration” images on Instagram, “images designed to motivate people to exercise and eat healthily” (Fardouly et al. 2017 p3), but which in reality promote a focus on the appearance of slim toned bodies.

Such social media manipulations specifically influence the presentation of ballet and dancers online. While an increased online presence of ballet is to be welcomed as potentially a democratising strategy for disseminating what is more usually perceived as exclusive and elitist, there are serious concerns as to the safety and appropriateness of imitating some of what is found without the supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced teacher. At the Ballet, Why and How conference in 2012 Sanna Nordin-Bates sounded a warning about the discourse of ballet as “extreme” indiscriminately perpetuated in media both popular and academic; and how this can adversely affect public understanding as to the nature of ballet training:

“In these fora, the ballet genre is typically described as traditional, perfectionistic, authoritarian and selective... ideas relating to the extreme message – such as it being for young, female, thin, long-limbed, flexible, white, highly dedicated people – are pervasive. Try searching for 'ballet' in Google Images for a demonstration!”

(Nordin-Bates 2014 p53-54)

Theresa Ruth Howard reflected very recently in Dance Magazine on the influence of Instagram and the “suggested videos” thrown up to those searching ballet of “the multiple turners, the avid stretchers and we can't forget the endless balancers” (Howard 2018). Press coverage in Australia highlighted concerns about young dancers overstretching to meet impossible standards of gymnastic hyper-flexibility viewable on YouTube without any advice as to how these have been achieved, thereby incurring serious injury and putting at risk dance career aspirations. Dance physiotherapist Lisa Howell has seen a spike in hip and back injuries in young dancers:

“The biggest issue we have now is that people are taking moves from rhythmic gymnastics and trying to insert them into dance and trying to do this in a very, very quick way as a one stop shop, rather than looking at all of the detailed training that has to go in before any of those tricks are actually attempted.”
(Howell cited in Robinson & Whyte 2016 ABC News)

Social media's instant pictures and brief clips promote decontextualised skills without awareness of the long processes of progressive learning in structured ballet classes and repeated practice that have gone into acquiring them. Not only can this lead to specific injuries caused by following particular crazes; but also to a fragmented and reductive view of ballet as a sequence of tricks rather than dancing. The ability of the public to “like” and “follow” such social media validates and marketises such a perspective. This can now be seen exemplified in mainstream media in the prevailing hyperbolic, acrobatic dance styles acclaimed by the voting public on the BBC's talent show *The Greatest Dancer* which commenced in January 2019. The young dancers who present ever more startling examples of extreme technique at ballet's competitions are arguably a visible manifestation of the influence that social media has in forming tastes, and potentially shaping ballet's future development. This is an area which calls for more in depth study than is possible in this research. But I would suggest that this pervasive media depiction of fragmented gymnastic stunts misrepresents ballet to a wide public; and does little to encourage dancers to explore its ability as a performing art form to express human qualities, emotions, relationships and situations through a subtle and varied use of its vocabulary and technical resources.

7.8 To summarise

A survey of the practice of significant historic teachers reveals a ballet class structure developing organically over time, with an on-going process of experiment and revision in response to the needs of choreographic innovation and wider cultural trends. Barre-work in particular has evolved from a simple warm-up and leg strengthening exercises to a longer and fuller combination of exercises, including exploration of mobility of the torso, and the accommodation of higher extensions of the legs with implications for

posture and balance. This can sometimes be at the expense of time spent on centre practice and the extensive allegro *enchaînements* characteristic of 19th century ballet, and to accommodate 21st century requirements for gymnastic extensions in adage and multiple pirouettes. Although not always fully documented, verbalised or openly discussed, the pedagogic practice that Ben Spatz might see as the discipline's research into the embodiment of ballet's technique begins to emerge as more complex, sophisticated and variable than it is often presented. Thus I contend that the picture propagated in some sports science orientated research, of the ballet class as narrowly adhering to out of date teaching methods, is simplified and generalised and not always the case.

I return to the recommendations of *Fit to Dance?* with particular relevance to the ballet class. Brinson and Dick did not view warm-up as a purpose of the class, claiming that classes did not effectively accomplish that and therefore a separate warm-up was required. However in observation it was apparent that some consideration and process of warm-up is necessarily included within most classes, and can serve wider purposes than the purely physiological. Within a shared framework and in line with underlying principles of movement, the teachers I observed nevertheless shaped their classes individually to meet what they deemed the particular physical and technical needs of their students, experimenting with different solutions to the requirements of appropriate warm-up. It has been argued that the design of the class itself incorporates a graduated build-up of activity that integrates progressive warm-up and preparation for the dancing in which it culminates. Despite advocacy for the introduction of periodization as in athletics training, the progression of the class in its compositional development of dance material is recognised even by sceptical scientists as a sound and logical structure for physical and technical preparation.

Brinson and Dick also recommended that dancers should be physically fitter. There is

demonstrably potential within the ballet class for teachers and dancers to adapt their practice to cultivate appropriate fitness and the development of strength; the question raised is appropriateness for what. The amount of physical energy expended by a dancer in dancing is not necessarily an indicator of better dancing. Errol Pickford was clear in his mind that class was, as Brinson and Dick suggest, primarily the place for the absorption, practice and understanding of ballet's huge repertoire of steps, shapes and actions, essential knowledge that would enable dancers to meet the needs of choreographic works and expand their movement potential:

“... the vocabulary is key, the understanding of the vocabulary, because without that picture in your head you won't understand the steps and linking steps together, *enchaînements*, the bit from A to B, the linking steps, the *pas de bourrées*, the *glissades*, the *pas courus*...”

(EP interview @ 1min 40secs)

Teachers have therefore to find a way within their classes to balance meeting today's concerns about aerobic fitness and the development of strength through repetition with the need for analytical practice, to refine technical understanding and generate free and efficient articulation of balletic movement, as it continually evolves to both respond to and provoke choreographic innovation. Knowing about how the body works requires utilising anatomical and biomechanical knowledge proportionately, within the context of the embodied knowledge of dancing ballet as accumulated and developed by generations of dancers, choreographers and teachers. An excessive emphasis in class on the need to develop physical fitness in dancers suggests that the purpose of the class is for the training of executants – not for the wider education of dance practitioners who in addition to dancing may go on to create, teach, or study and research ballet, taking it forward in new directions.

Ballet classes can be seen to sit on a continuum between their conceptualisation as a means of developing a generic technical and physical fitness, and a body in line with a current aesthetic driven by fragmented and manipulated imagery online – and as a

means of learning how to dance and communicate through balletic performance. It is surely from the experiential exploration of dancing conceptualised as a means of artistic expression that not only ballet's performing artists but also choreographers of the future are to be drawn. Within the genre of ballet the ballet class must therefore give proper weight to facilitating this experience, and providing dancers with understanding, knowledge and skills of their medium that they can bring to the creation of new dances. Roger Tully, drawing on an older stylistic tradition with roots in ballet's creative and performance innovations of the early twentieth century, frequently reminded his students that, despite their on-going investigation into the mechanics of balletic movement, and their striving for physical refinement in execution, in class

“There are no exercises; there is only dancing.”

In the light of the increasingly diverse repertoire of ballet in the 21st century the class as a process needs to be conceptualised not in purely physical terms as simply warming and strengthening the body, but also preparing dancers mentally and technically for dancing's complex integration of skills in ever changing combination. As Howard reminds us:

“*Dancing* happens in the transitions, in the pathways. The foundation of technique is in the “how” steps are entered and exited.”

(Howard 2018)

Chapters 6 and 7 have addressed my second research question by elucidating the aims of current and historic classes, and how their dance content has evolved and is shaped by these diverse and sometimes conflicting purposes. The next chapter will consider in more detail the relationship of what is learned within the classes to ballet's widening choreographic repertoire.

Chapter 8: Class in relation to repertoire

“Technique needs to relate to repertoire, and the repertoire must be an outlet for technique, or it loses its value.”

(Russell in Speer 2010 p127)

This chapter considers the ways in which ballet class technical content can be related to balletic movement as it may appear in artistic compositions, and what the experience of this relationship may potentially contribute to the development of creative practice in dancers. It compares two very different approaches to the connection between technical study and repertoire in the daily classes of two major international companies, before considering examples of how the relationship was manifested in other classes studied. Discussion of the contested concept of stylistic neutrality in training explores the conflation of ballet’s technical *danse d’école* or academic schooling with aspects of a late 19th century style as evinced in the classical repertoire; this in many minds being considered the gold standard for vocational training, yet without recognising its particular stylistic bias. Ignoring or denying the varied stylistic adaptation of the *danse d’école* to meet choreographic ends risks reducing classes to mere physical and gymnastic training. This can be perceived in today’s wider professional dance culture, where many ballet classes have changing status and purpose, becoming part of individualized training programmes constructed to service commercial or project needs; but deeper somatic study is also bringing new learning and priorities. Simultaneously initiatives in non-vocational and leisure settings suggest some ways to re-connect technical learning with repertoire.

8.1 Historical context; examples of evolving company practice

Ballet history provides cogent examples of the relationship of the technique class to repertoire, a feedback loop in which the technique required to dance particular

choreographies can be developed and reinforced in the class, and the technique and manners of the dancers developed through the class can influence the movement palette and style of choreographers working with those dancers. The following selected examples span a similar historical trajectory to the classwork of influential teachers considered in the previous chapter, from mid 19th century onwards.

In the Bournonville schooling of the Royal Danish Ballet an on-going relationship between class content and the choreographer's ballets has been documented and long preserved in company practice. Eric Bruhn describes how the training he received at the Royal Danish Ballet School (1937-1947) even from a young age consisted largely of the study of the Bournonville choreography which formed the "centre and very base" of the Royal Danish Ballet's repertoire (Bruhn & Moore, 2005 p12). Major 20th century choreographers have also used the class as a laboratory for devising a personal balletic idiom. During her time teaching and choreographing in Kiev (1915-1921), Bronislava Nijinska was developing both her choreographic ideas and a pedagogic vision that would support her creative work. She experimented with an innovative curriculum for the education of the dancers of the future, where ballet as a foundation study was joined by "character dance" (Garafola 2011 p131), incorporating new aspects of movement into the ballet class, for example turned-in as well as turned-out movement, to enrich the dancer's mastery and versatility (Garafola 2011, pp123-4). Balanchine's idiosyncratic class teaching was geared to the development of particular qualities of movement that he was exploring in his choreographic work, and to dancers who could embody these qualities. Brady describes examples of technical experimentation that were to become recognisable hallmarks of Balanchine style; the extremely crossed 5th position of the feet, jumping without putting the heels down, and the development of a distinctive *pas de chat* (Brady, 1982 pp149-152).

However in considering equivalent professional ballet practice in the UK it should be

noted that with the exception of Peter Wright and de Valois herself, the Royal Ballet's choreographers have not taught class; once they have been recognised as choreographic talents this aspect of their work tends to become a full time commitment. Many of the class teachers recently on the staff roster have come not from within the Royal Ballet but as international artists rooted in other traditions, and therefore not necessarily familiar with the Royal Ballet's repertoire and history. No doubt in part an inevitable consequence of the growth of the Royal Ballet institution, and with increasing specialisation of company roles, there has been a separation between choreography and teaching, and often between the responsibilities of class teacher and coach/repertoireur. The historic designation of "ballet master" (which Balanchine maintained), whose role would have included the imparting of technical knowledge as well as the making of dances, is now largely unused, with a clearer distinction in employment between teachers and choreographers. This is increasingly true of major and large-scale ballet companies nationally and internationally; Christopher Hampson, Director of Scottish Ballet, is one of few exceptions to this, continuing to give some company classes.

Such relationships between daily training and choreographic practice seem to have generally developed within formalised training established to support a performing company, rather than in the context of independent studio teaching for dancers with a range of backgrounds and needs. In the wider teaching and dissemination of ballet beyond companies and their related conservatoires the direct link between training and the creation and performance of repertoire potentially becomes even more distended and precarious, and in some contexts has disappeared. The classes I observed provided varied evidence of the nature of this relationship within current ballet teaching and study; but I start by comparing ballet company classes with very different approaches to this. One epitomizes a visceral connection to the work of a specific choreographer; the other endeavours to provide a "neutral" preparation for dancers

tasked with performing a very varied repertoire.

8.2 Classes for dancing Ashton and Balanchine

Close analysis of the Royal Ballet class taught by Brian Maloney, and comparison with the content of company classes taught by Balanchine as documented by his disciple Suki Schorer, suggest two very different understandings to reflect in classes preparing dancers to perform ballet's repertoire, here respectively ballets by Ashton and Balanchine.

In her examination of style, performance and choreography in six Ashton ballets, Geraldine Morris discusses Ashton's particular use of ballet's codified vocabulary, the "*danse d'école*, the sets of movement embodied in the balletic code" (Morris, 2012 p5), drawing attention to particular stylistic characteristics in his choreography:

Ashton was not interested in presenting the 'correct' version of the classroom code. For instance, he was more concerned with the qualitative elements of the movement than the linear shape; it is more important for dancers to retain the speed and emphasis than the correct shape or position... Altered codified steps are thus a feature of his style and, as a result, different criteria are required for their performance. No longer dependent on the rules governing the performance of the *danse d'école*, they become other than classical steps.
(Morris, 2012 p21)

She also draws attention to the "multi-faceted body" of the Ashton dancer:

Ashton required his dancers to twist, turn, curve, dive and stretch and when he instructed them to bend, he meant all of these features. So the three dimensional body is fundamental to his dance style.
(Morris, 2012 p21)

Thus dancers performing his ballets need not only a comprehensive understanding of and familiarity with balletic vocabulary, but also the mastery to be able to adapt it in execution, to recombine its elements, and to shade them with varying degrees of emphasis according to their context within the musical phrase; and through this to

begin to experience and cultivate the particular movement qualities associated with his works. The ballet class can therefore make an important contribution in preparing dancers for this process, educating for an awareness of the distinction between broad movement principles which underlie balletic vocabulary, and stylistically varied uses of it such as Ashton's. Dancers might develop more finely differentiated knowledge of classical steps and movements by experiencing how they have been adapted to particular expressive contexts. Understanding and exploring this variability would prepare them confidently to make technical changes and adapt balletic material, to meet the expressive requirements not just of Ashton's dance language but of other choreographic styles – and potentially in making their own dances.

In studying the World Ballet Day 2014 Royal Ballet class on video, I looked to see if the class material might have been adapted to prepare dancers to convey the specific characteristics of this repertoire. Two weeks after this class the company had performed an all Ashton programme of *Scènes de Ballet*, *Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan*, *Symphonic Variations*, and *A Month in the Country*. BM joined the Royal Ballet in 2000, where he danced for 13 years in a variety of roles, including in quintessentially Ashton ballets such as *La Fille mal gardée*, *Enigma Variations*, *Les Patineurs* and *Les Rendezvous*. Within company classes aesthetic choices and priorities are daily being absorbed through habitual practice. Those informing this particular class were not made explicit; but I assumed that BM could bring to his teaching at this time a practitioner's personal insight into the technical requirements of Ashtonian choreographic material, developed from classical steps studied by dancers in the technique class.

Detailed examination of the dance content of BM's class suggests little apparent connection between this class and this area of the Royal Ballet's repertoire in terms of material that would help to develop the particular technical skills needed, and reveal

the qualities identified by Morris as exemplified in Ashton's ballets. All the *enchaînements* were built around the upright vertical body that is at the core of many current conceptions of the technique of the *danse d'école*; at no point in the centre work were the dancers required to bend the torso. The vocabulary of the *enchaînements* remained within a conventional range of accepted and familiar balletic tropes; there was little exploration of the potential for multiple variation of basic steps that Ashton's ballets showcase. The traditional strategy of reversing exercises so that elements performed forwards are performed backwards and vice versa, in addition to being performed on the other side of the body, can challenge the dancer to explore less familiar and comfortable areas of technique and varied compositional options. In this class at the barre exercises were reversed; but none of the centre-work *enchaînements* were attempted in reverse. In the centre, facing the mirror to facilitate personal scrutiny while dancing encouraged the flattening of dancers' lines to expand the visual image, thereby losing nuanced changes of directions, and minimising the three dimensional spirals of *épaulement* that are so much a feature of Ashton's work.

It would appear by contrast that New York City Ballet company classes had very clear aims in terms of developing and embedding Balanchine's unique style. Former New York City Ballet dancer Suki Schorer became Balanchine's trusted teacher for both company and school, and describes his teaching and classwork in impressive detail. Her book 'Suki Schorer on Balanchine Technique' (Schorer 1999) reveals how “Mr. B's” classes were overtly geared at every level to prepare dancers not just for the specific choreographic challenges of individual works, but to cultivate a distinctive overall company style and aesthetic:

“He [Balanchine] knew the look he wanted onstage, and it was a new, American look, even though the technique was rooted in the classical tradition. This American look was about energy, because Americans are energetic. It was to be expansive, because Americans occupied a whole continent. It was to be open to diverse influences, because America incorporated elements from around the world. It was to be about the future, about becoming, because America was a new society still being formed. Mr. B taught because he needed dancers with his new look to make his new kinds of dances... He taught

because dancers who could only do the traditional steps in the traditional way were not prepared to dance his ballets.”

(Schorer 1999 p24-5)

Without describing or documenting actual classes Schorer's book details the technical content of Balanchine's classes, fully explaining in verbal form accompanied by sequential photographs exactly how Mr. B required steps and movements to be executed. Her account gives remarkable insight into Balanchine's stylistic particularities and preferences; not simply at an aesthetic level, such as his preferred grouping of the fingers and ornamental pathways of classic *ports de bras*, but also functional principles of execution with potential to affect posture, alignment and coordination, for example:

- keeping the body upright in high leg extensions
- the dancer's weight to be over the balls of the feet not the heels
- not passing through the *demi-pointe* in extending the leg in *battement tendu*
- the extremely crossed 5th position of the foot with the end of the toe of each foot in line with the heel of the other
- opening the hip of the lifted leg in *arabesque*
- height of lifted *retiré* foot as rising over the knee of the supporting leg.

Some of these can be seen as in contention with other training methods and understandings; it would seem that Balanchine was keen to go beyond what he saw as the old-fashioned “politeness” of previous generations, and was dismissive of “small, contained, proper dancing” (ibid p24). Despite his apparent recognition of other ways to dance ballet, Schorer's devotional text makes clear the need for dancers in New York City Ballet to be prepared if necessary to abandon previous training habits in order to fully embrace Balanchine's way of dancing: “He just wanted us to dance his way so his ballets looked the way he wanted.” (ibid p18).

In a company devoted almost entirely to the work of a particular choreographer as New York City Ballet then was, and continuing later with a repertoire shaped mainly by dancers working from within that aesthetic and tradition, such a complete and exclusive

adoption of a particular approach may be feasible and desirable. In such circumstances it is possible to develop what Veronica Dittman eloquently describes as “the type of bone-deep unison that comes naturally to a company of dancers who share a uniformity of training and a long consistent history together” (Dittman 2008 p26), and which can be a hallmark of great international companies supported by their own conservatoires. As Schorer puts it:

“To me, the key characteristics of the Balanchine dancer are achieved through working in his technique, starting in class, at the barre. There is no other way to develop quickness; speed; energy; legibility of gesture; full articulation of every step; a sensitive response in movement to any part of the music; a natural, open face; and an individual nuance within the dance design.”
(Schorer 1999 p21)

In this context the class, more than a warm-up or technical maintenance, provides an initial laboratory for the development of a characteristic balletic “dialect” and manner of performance that can provide a foundation for making works within this defined style. But dancers in companies such as the Royal Ballet, balancing a range of works by different choreographers, and increasingly drawn from different schoolings, are faced with constantly having to re-construct their techniques in order to be able to perform mixed repertoire, if the distinctive qualities of particular choreographers' works are not to be eroded. For dancers to be able to adapt their stylistic habitus to meet the needs of different choreographies, they must be conscious of the range of possible interpretations of ballet's *danse d'école*, and the aesthetic choices and priorities that may govern the classes they are obliged to do; aware of the choices available to them, and encouraged to explore as necessary alternative technical approaches and movement qualities appropriate to the dances they are to perform. Hence classes must not indoctrinate dancers into one way of dancing, but provide opportunities to experience a range of ways; educating dancers consciously to discriminate critically as to inflexions and modifications of classical vocabulary, and autonomously to use their technical knowledge to find appropriate ways to embody a given style.

Yet rather than educate through the ballet class for awareness of a multiplicity of style, there is in many classes today an opposite tendency to eliminate what are perceived to be stylistic elements from the class content.

8.3 The *danse d'école* and the “neutral” ballet class

The very need to enable dancers to meet the current diversity of choreography in ballet companies has driven what Morris describes as “a quest for an inclusive system of training that is style-less and which allows dancers to embrace any style of dance movement” (Morris 2003, p18). For a repertory company there is a powerful and seductive argument for aiming to provide a “neutral” company class which returns to what are widely regarded as traditional principles and conceptions of the *danse d'école*, and teaches a 'pure' technique which is not inflected by a specific choreographic style.

Richard Glasstone defines the *danse d'école* as

“The formal technique and style of classical ballet dancing, based on the turn-out of the legs and the five positions of the feet (with the line of the legs extended by stretching the feet) and using traditional port de bras. This term can be translated as academic dance, in the sense that it depends on the formally structured, codified schooling of performers...”

(Glasstone 2013 p17)

In the Encyclopedia Britannica's definition the term similarly suggests a core technique of formal academic dance, which is then conjoined with other artistic elements such as music and stage design to make ballets for theatrical presentation (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019). Thus the *danse d'école* forms the essential content of the ballet class; but how far is stylistic variation of this core acceptable and acknowledged?

While clearly pointing to a sense of universally shared technical principles such as turn-out, Glasstone's definition raises more questions than it answers; as to what constitutes “traditional”, given the evidence of historical evolution in ballet's technique and vocabulary that has already been noted. The words “rules” and “correct” are widely used in relation to the *danse d'école* (see Morris 2012 p 21 for an example, also

Lawson 1988); but what the rules are and what is correct are contentious issues, and beg the question of who defines them.

Chris Challis sees ballet as “not a single system of training but many”, inherently expressive of distinct “traditions, conventions and values” (Challis in McFee ed. 1999 p145); Schorer provides a clear description of one such schooling. In her account, this goes beyond stylistic inflection; even what might appear to be mechanical and structural principles underlying balletic technique are not necessarily universally accepted, they remain options and approaches open to contestation.

The conception of one absolute and universally shared “neutral” *danse d'école* can be strongly challenged in the light of the undeniable existence of such differing understandings and interpretations of ballet's technical knowledge. In discussing the training of actors Ben Spatz warns against the illusion that technique can be reduced to the purely mechanical, “lacking intention and meaning”. He sees 'empty technique' as “a red herring that most often works to conceal the variety of goals and desires motivating practice” (Spatz 2015, p152). In ballet “neutral” technique is similarly an unattainable aspiration because of the inevitability of stylistic inflection, acquired through the influences bodily absorbed both in different training and performance contexts, shaping the dancer's unconscious habitus, and conveying underlying values and meanings embodied in the dancing. As Susan Leigh Foster when contrasting a range of dance genres puts it:

“The daily practical participation of a body in any of these disciplines makes of it a body of ideas.”

(Foster 1999 p236)

Nevertheless the search for stylistic neutrality persists. The highly influential American teacher Maggie Black is a salient example of a respected pedagogue who developed a method of teaching ballet technique that aimed to be independent of “stylistic

idiosyncracies” and thus to prepare dancers to deal with a range of repertoire (Zeller 2009). Whereas Balanchine was using classes as a laboratory for experiment “to explore the possibility of adding something new to his choreographic choices” (Schorer 1999 p31), Black's classes were centred on developing and assisting individual dancers in her care. The classes she gave at her studio in New York from the late 1960s through the 1970s and 1980s attracted not only ballet stars such as Gelsey Kirkland, Natalia Makarova, Martine van Hamel and Kevin McKenzie, who danced with the repertory company American Ballet Theatre, but also Cunningham dancers who found the unaffected clarity of presentation and Black's technical focus on balanced alignment of the body congenial (Zeller 2009).

Zeller's detailed account of Maggie Black's technical preferences gives insight into some of the areas of difference between particular schools of thought that might have visible effect on stage performance, and in choreography. Even Black's unadorned approach to ballet technique with its emphasis on efficient body placement and alignment could be seen to manifest particular aesthetic choices, such as, for example, her attitude to *épaulement*, allowed but not necessarily promoted, and not used at the barre. There is a technical discussion to be had as to what extent such characteristics are integral to the mechanical function of balletic vocabulary, or are stylistic overlay to be added or subtracted at will. Zeller identifies as major influences on Black's teaching the anatomically focused and remedial perspective of Audrey De Vos, but also choreographer Antony Tudor with whom Black worked as a dancer at the Met, and subsequently assisted in his post on the teaching faculty at the Julliard School of Music. Zeller speculates that Black's emphasis “on correlating line, musicality and bodily sensitivity was likely derived from her work with Tudor” (Zeller 2009 p80); but they nevertheless diverged on the matter of *épaulement* and the expressive use of the back, also on the exploration of unusual or inventive movement material in class.

Thus for all its desire to prepare dancers to be adaptable, and its virtue in nurturing the

individual practitioner, Black's work as a teacher emerges as being of a stylistic particularity in its influences, choices and context that could not be described as entirely "neutral".

Since her doctoral analysis of Ashton's style Morris has consistently challenged what she sees as the ballet community's inability to perceive the stylistic aspects of different training methods, leading to unquestioning acceptance of the dominant orthodoxies of major schools of training, whether the Balanchine training of School of American Ballet, or the codified schooling developed from the teaching of Agrippina Vaganova. She argues against a hegemonic view of ballet technique, and for recognition of a multiplicity of stylistic approaches; and the need for the education of an informed dancer capable of making appropriate decisions as to not just the dramatic and emotional, but also the dancerly and technical interpretation of specific choreographies. She suggests that the expunging of conscious consideration of questions of both personal and choreographic styles within the training provided in technique classes contributes to rendering dancers and teachers incapable of recognising the effect that stylistic characteristics embedded in a particular training may have on their own bodies, and therefore on their abilities authentically to embody specific dance works; with grave consequences for the future development of ballet as an art form. In the search for neutrality the influence of stylistic dimensions emerging from specific choreographic works and ballet's historic artistic heritage, and transmitted by dancers who embodied them, is now replaced by training styles claiming quasi scientific universality, yet whose inbuilt biases and limitations may remain unacknowledged. Ballet's codified training systems laid down in the manuals of major pedagogues present an objectified vocabulary of steps and positions, giving little consideration to the ways in which choreographed movement may connect them:

"...instructions and definitions are presented as autonomous, impersonal prescriptions for executing ballet's codified steps 'correctly'... According to Joan Lawson (1979, p8... the classical in dance comprises 'a vocabulary of movement that conforms to rules established by long practice'. Consequently,

there can be no individual interpretation of these rules and no changes made to them.”

(Morris 2003, p19)

Morris's critique hits hard at teachers; what she is aiming at is perhaps more the institutionalised training systems embraced by major teaching establishments, rather than the instructional practice of individuals, where examples of imaginative and freer approaches may be found. Soviet training methods have been adopted in Japan, China, and Korea; and the Vaganova system is widely used in USA and was introduced to the Royal Ballet School in the 1980s under Merle Park's directorship. BM, albeit tempered by his time with the Royal Ballet, could be seen as a product of this pedagogic diaspora, experiencing formative training at the Kirov Academy in Washington, followed by performance with the Jeune Ballet de France. This company aimed to give talented young dancers drawn together from all over the world professional performing experience in a repertoire centred on Russian staples such as the *pas de deux* from *Le Corsaire* and *Diana and Acteon*.

Morris finds the absolutism of hegemonic Vaganova based training problematic. She notes in particular the separation in the teaching of steps into discrete units which can only be performed in one correct way (Morris 2012, pp4-8). The allegro *enchaînement* from BM's class, which incorporated a range of standard steps including *entrechats*, *glissade jeté*, *coupé ballonné* and *pas ballotté* (RB class from 53mins 36secs), seemed to exemplify this tendency; with every shape given equal weighting, lending the dancing an emphatic quality and constant dynamic. While aiming to give pictorial clarity to the dancer's every position, this approach nevertheless represents a stylistic choice which leaves little room for acceptance of other legitimate manners of execution of particular elements that might emerge from different values. Or for the idea that steps might need to adapt according to their choreographic context, to what precedes or follows them, and in response to any musical or expressive imperative; that steps in a phrase of movement may not always be equally weighted or take the same time in

execution. It leaves little space for individual choice in the interpretation and shading of movement, the exercise of which might enable dancers to adapt convincingly to the multiplicity of choreographic styles now encompassed by major repertory companies. Such a training may be envisaged as a neutral technical preparation for performing a wide range of repertoire. But potentially in discouraging dancers from making personal choices as to stylistic nuance and interpretation in their execution of *enchaînements*, and in not acknowledging its own stylistic characteristics as one option among many, it inhibits the cultivation of playful exploration of balletic material which must be a starting point for choreographic experiment and the generation of new dances within the genre.

8.4 19th century ballet as foundation technique

If the core technique of the *danse d'école* as manifest in ballet technique classes is porous and open to stylistic influence from choreographic repertoire, in practice interchange can potentially operate on different levels. The learning of specific sequences, steps and movements from particular ballets within classes provides an obvious way in to embodied experience of choreographic material from a technical perspective, with opportunities for detailed investigation and analytical practice. Through such immersive experiential study recurring stylistic characteristics and aesthetic qualities in repertoire may become apparent, that can then be incorporated by teachers in fresh *enchaînements* that may yet retain and embody essential stylistic qualities of particular choreographers or works. Thus a *danse d'école* adapted to be relevant to a body of artistic work, technical capabilities with acknowledged stylistic inflection, can begin to emerge through embodiment by the dancers and transmission by the teacher. Dancers can thus be familiarized through practice with elements of ballet's repertoire, and begin to understand how its technical resources can be used in choreographic works.

Beneath these practical levels arguably lies a third in terms of the values and ethical dimensions not only underlying specific ballets and the ideals to which their performers should aspire, but also the *danse d'école* itself. As Joshua Monten succinctly puts it, "Any given technique will also carry with it a subtext, an ideology, a philosophy, a somatic paradigm" (Monten 2008 p64).

Of the classes I observed perhaps Errol Pickford's class for male students at Elmhurst most clearly conveyed a sense of a style and the values underlying it; distinct from the Vaganova inflected class taught by Brian Maloney, but with a palpably clear relation to a particular way of dancing (see Appendix 4 for resumé of class content). Without drawing directly on specific recognisable material from classical ballet repertoire, EP was able to concoct a sequence of *enchaînements* that invited the students to embody the dancing and demeanor of the classical *danseur noble*, aspiring to combine technical brilliance with graceful and manly dignity. This persona informed not only the material but also the delivery of the class. Expectations were rigorous, but within an atmosphere of masculine camaraderie which allowed for some jokes, laughter and banter, and occasionally for the students to answer back. EP afterwards commented that this was a right that had to be earned through hard work. Praise was rare, but there was no negativity or anger, simply drawing attention to elements that needed modification or improvement. An old fashioned formality of behaviour towards guests was evident; I was courteously introduced to the group, two students moved my table and chair to offer me a better vantage point for the centre-work, and when David Bintley arrived during the *pirouette enchaînement* the music stopped and all the students bowed respectfully before resuming dancing.

Here was a stylistic conception of the male principal dancer as manly, heroic, dignified and chivalrous, familiar from classical ballets of the late 19th century. Was there a

danger of unconscious conflation of the cultivation of dancing in this manner with the technical study which must also serve as preparation for the diverse and evolving repertoire of the 20th and 21st centuries? EP was consciously preparing students for ballet companies whose repertoire might range from historic works through neo-classical to avant-garde contemporary choreography. Yet the decisions taken for this audition-focused class as to style, content and format conveyed underlying adherence to the long and widely held assumption of the superiority and foundational status as dance training of what is seen as a traditional interpretation of ballet's *danse d'école*. The notion prevails in many ballet circles that dancers who have mastered this as it is exemplified in classic 19th century repertoire can do anything else. Chris Challis sees this assumption as based on a series of misunderstandings:

“Firstly, it assumes a commonality of dance forms which can be traced back to ballet; secondly, it assumes that if dancers can perform ballet, then they can perform any dance form, a principle which underlies the mistaken assumption of a hierarchy of dance with ballet taking precedence; thirdly it assumes an incorrect relationship between technique and performance.”

(Challis 1999 p145)

Yet this belief continues to persist strongly in the heart and daily reality of vocational dance training and professional practice. Researching in 2000, Anna Aalten interviewed teachers and directors of vocational dance schools who confirmed their conviction that “classical or academic technique was the foundation of the curriculum” even for those preparing for careers in contemporary dance. Ten years later she maintained that her original question challenging this conception, 'Is Classical Ballet Technique Sacrosanct?', still needed to be asked (Aalten in Brown & Vos 2014 p47). In 2017 evidence of it could be found in the London Studio Centre policy that all students, regardless of their chosen dance strand and career destinations (which potentially include contemporary companies, commercial dance employment including television, cruise ships and advertising, as well as musical theatre), should continue ballet classes throughout their three-year course.

Challis maintains that a double turn in ballet is fundamentally different from a double turn in jazz (Challis 1999 p145). Yet at some level there is useful and transferable bodily knowledge, or why would successful schools such as LSC continue to programme rigorous ballet classes for musical theatre and commercial dance students? Experienced and thoughtful ballet practitioners such as Jennifer Jackson and Matthew Hawkins support the notion that at a meta-level of learning a rigorous in-depth knowledge of one dance style “can equip a dancer with the skills to study another” (Jackson 2005 p33). It was apparent in the LSC group interview that these students valued the intensive ballet training they had received, comparing their college's non-negotiable insistence on frequent ballet classes favourably to lesser provision at other training establishments. They were enthusiastic about the benefits that they perceived ballet to be giving them as musical theatre performers; not simply technically in their dancing - in terms of mastery of dance vocabulary, improved posture, strength, balance and flexibility - but in broader performance skills, such as breathing, confidence and presentation. They were full of admiration for ballet dancers currently combining advanced balletic abilities with singing and acting in shows like *An American in Paris*; as well as for their colleagues at LSC specialising in ballet, for their commitment and discipline in grappling with an advanced and demanding technique (LSC student group interview 28/3/17). Even those RAD students interviewed for whom ballet was not their favourite dance style saw it as an essential foundation that would enable a better grasp of other dance techniques:

“What I do really appreciate is the technique, and the basis, the formation... even though my technique isn't that great, it's allowed me to build up and explore the other dance styles in ways that I wouldn't have, I don't feel like I would have been able to do. So coming from a training point of view I think it has been really useful just to have that basis; um, and then hopefully if all goes to plan I'll go into some different kind of room; but always have it as like my background and foundation knowledge.”

(RAD student group interview @1min 51secs)

“I think I do ballet so that I can teach contemporary but have the fundamentals of a strong technique first.”

(RAD student group interview @3mins 30secs)

Thus it appears that a “traditional” ballet training continues to be widely respected both for developing practical technical knowledge but also for such transferable virtues as precision, discipline and commitment, that its study requires and inculcates, and which potentially can be productively applied to the learning of other dance techniques.

EP’s modelling of the *danseur noble* was founded in his own direct experience of dancing such roles, primarily with the Royal Ballet. His conception therefore conveyed a powerful sense of theatrical authenticity, both in the manner of dancing cultivated as well as in the spatial and compositional arrangement, to what might otherwise have seemed textbook academic *enchaînements*. His embodied experience potentially communicated historical and contextual insights, lending a different dimension to the material he was teaching; and visibly coloured the execution of the young dancers he was teaching. These messages were reinforced by piano accompaniment which included music from 19th century repertoire such as *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Napoli*, *Esmeralda* and *Don Quixote*, with much of which these graduating vocational students would be familiar. The class might therefore be seen as a powerful example of ballet’s embodied tradition of learning, transmitting the knowledge of a skilful practitioner to young dancers on multiple sensory levels; Bourdieu’s conception of practical mastery as “transmitted through practice, in the practical state, without rising to the level of discourse.” (Bourdieu trans. Nice 1990 p73-4). Its rich and challenging technical content was utilised within a clear stylistic framework; but nevertheless reflected the dominance of ballet’s 19th century canon as setting the benchmark for technical execution and knowledge, to which dancers, companies and audiences defer without always recognising its stylistic biases.

What seemed to be absent among students interviewed was awareness or appreciation of the expressive potential and stylistic range of balletic material. This might be cultivated through a direct experience of how the *danse d’école* can be - and

has been - explored and adapted for use in the making and performing of ballets, as in EP's class; but such embodied absorption is rarely consciously contextualised. Not all students would have access to such a direct primary source of ballet's embodied knowledge as EP. As discussed in the previous chapter, many will now become familiar with repertoire from today's profusion of video clips of dancers performing isolated solos from 19th century ballets in studio or competition contexts, where they are shorn of all historic, dramatic or stylistic context as Morris had observed (Morris 2008). Despite their years of rich experience as professional dancers, neither Laura Hussey nor Eric Assandri made specific reference in their class content or delivery to the repertoire that they had absorbed as performers, nor to the performing or teaching traditions they were shaped by. LH deliberately eschewed musical reference to specific ballet repertoire in her classes (although sanctioning the association with musical theatre through the inclusion of well-known melodies from major shows).

Melanie Bales believes that the ability to bring out the principles underlying a form in such a way as to make them accessible to dancers coming from other backgrounds is a hallmark of successful teachers (Bales 2008b). At Northern School of Contemporary Dance Eric Assandri seemed to be finding a way meaningfully to distill basic principles acquired through his experience of such highly specific classical training traditions as the French school, the Russian teaching of Besobrasova, and the Danish tradition, into *enchaînements* accessible to young contemporary dancers heading on a very different trajectory. While introducing balletic vocabulary his teaching prioritises from the start broader fundamental concepts such as "the alignment, the posture, the directions" drawing attention to movement and breath which open possibilities for performance and musicality in interpretation (EA interview 29secs – 1min 30secs). It would however have been particularly good to see this work of building a foundation of technical understanding contextualized for students, giving them a sense of its historic origins and potential artistic outcomes as reflected through EA's own rich experience.

Ultimately, however studiously relation to specific repertoire may be avoided, similarly to that of BM, EP's, LH's and EA's classes cannot claim academic neutrality. In their interpretation and individual construction of ballet's knowledge all these apparently technical classes embody a subtext, ideology, philosophy, and somatic paradigm as Monten has remarked (Monten 2008 p64), however submerged below a particular style or avowed absence of style. If teachers do not acknowledge or draw attention to style explicitly, students are unlikely to understand where what can seem arcane and counterintuitive practices are coming from; or to associate ballet's technical knowledge with creative practices of interpretation or the making of new dances for performance. Without stated reference to and exploration of examples of use in artistic works of the dance material and abilities afforded by the *danse d'école*, the ballet class is in danger of being reduced to a training in narrowly defined and measured gymnastic skills, and the acquisition of habits of self discipline channeled towards the highly focused repetitive activity that these require; with a consequent loss of both the physical and mental adaptability needed for artistic expression.

8.5 Making connections to repertoire

In vocational training there is perhaps an assumption that dancers will have sufficient opportunity outside the class to learn about and experience repertoire. Students at LSC and RAD had some opportunities to experience ballet's historic repertoire in practice; LH occasionally teaching corps de ballet workshops to her musical theatre students as a means of developing their ability to dance in an ensemble, and RAD students learning both corps de ballet work and solos over the span of their course, as well as undertaking contextual studies in dance history and criticism. Students in all the colleges visited took advantage of any opportunities afforded to see repertoire in

performance; yet their viewing, circumscribed by current and local programming to an extent that study of music or literature are not, could hardly be described as giving wide access to the range of ballet's repertoire. Thus greater responsibility is potentially put on their teachers as to opening awareness to ballet's creative diversity and potential as evident in its "literature". All the teachers at the conservatoires visited had substantial personal performing experience of a rich range of repertoire through the prestigious companies and productions they had danced with. In EP's teaching it was possible to see this experience channeled directly into the content of a technique class. But apart from that there was virtually no direct connection made to repertoire in any of the classwork I observed in vocational settings.

The class where this issue of connection perhaps arose most obviously was that taught by Guy Burden at the RAD, part of a practical unit *BBE501: Technique and Performance*, incorporating not only technique classes but also the learning of classical and contemporary solos for assessment. Here potentially was an opportunity to design class content specifically to prepare the students for the particular technical and stylistic requirements of the repertoire to be studied. GB had chosen two very contrasted solos; the Summer Fairy solo from Ashton's *Cinderella* and the Bransle Gay from Balanchine's *Agon*, both strongly exemplifying salient characteristics of their respective choreographers' styles, balletic vocabulary and movement preferences. Focusing the classwork on material from the solos to be studied would have made starkly apparent the different technical requirements and aesthetic values of the two choreographers.

However, through the exigencies of the schedule and curriculum, the classwork element of this session was of necessity reduced to a short warm-up to prepare and enable students to work in safety on challenging repertoire. A couple of elements included in the material of the warm-up (lunge on *demi-pointe* in a *battement tendu*

exercise, inclusion of a *pirouette* at the barre) potentially referred to the actual dance material in the solo to be studied (on this day the Bransle Gay); but the briefness of the barre precluded spending time consciously exploring these connections. In the wider context of the course GB's repeated set barre-work sequence needed also to do duty as part of students' preparation for a range of dancing activity. Thus it was not solely designed to meet the needs of a specific session (such as here) but as part of general practical study of ballet to inform teaching in a range of educational contexts, that might include delivering the extensive RAD syllabus material in the private sector for progressively graded examination, or broader dance studies within the state sector aiming towards GCSE dance. So this session exemplified the tension between purposes of the class as a generic technical training and physical warm-up, and as a focused preparation for dancing balletic repertoire.

Outside vocational schools there now appears to be increased interest in repertoire studies for non-vocational learners of ballet. Company outreach programmes have long offered practical workshops based on their repertoire, but previously perhaps more usually aimed at younger audience members and students, and drawing on more contemporary formats or material, less related to the ballet training that underpins the work of company dancers. English National Ballet now schedules regular ballet technique classes for adult learners in response to growing interest and demand, and this has recently opened the way for additional workshop sessions to learn ballet repertoire (English National Ballet website 2018). Their successful association with the Dance for Parkinsons programme has developed a format for teaching sessions that involve not only basic technical exercises but movement and gestural elements from works currently in repertoire that participants get the opportunity to go and see in performance (Dance for Parkinsons website 2018). The Royal Academy of Dance has just initiated an examination syllabus for more experienced students to study repertoire in the form of classical solos; with modular units including class-work, "development

exercises” and a solo (Discovering Repertoire, 2018). So ways are being explored to restore a connection between technical and artistic study.

In concluding her discussion of ‘Artistry or mere technique?’ Morris suggested as one solution technique classes that focus on a particular style through the inclusion of material from relevant choreographies, returning to the Bournonville class model (Morris 2008 p50). I have been experimenting in my teaching with the inclusion of such material within class for some time, triggered by an experience of teaching repertoire to BA students at University of Roehampton in the late 1990s. To make best use of limited time I designed both the barre-work and centre studies of the accompanying technique class to incorporate fragments of the solo (the Waltz from *Les Sylphides*), in order to increase students’ familiarity with its vocabulary and enable technical analysis and practice of its more challenging elements. I was excited by both the positive effect of this strategy on students’ performance, and also the fresh ideas that it gave me for composing more inventive classroom *enchaînements*. I have continued to explore this, particularly in my teaching of adult beginners.

Here dance can perhaps learn from a rich tradition of musical compositions which start with a technical aim but often transcend mechanics to make an artistic statement. In setting material for these classes I see myself as making tiny technical study compositions, with both artistic and didactic intention; following the example of composers such as Béla Bartók in his *Mikrokosmos* pieces for learner pianists progressing from beginner to expert (Bartók 1987). Bartók’s pieces are designed to exemplify and provide progressive study and practice of technical elements. Yet even at the most preparatory level they are always presented as miniatures for performance, rather than exercises; as well as having an expressive potential they introduce compositional ideas, strategies and patterns/schemas for players to identify, build on and combine. This sort of composition concentrates the teaching mind, requiring

decisions as to the most crucial elements that inexperienced students may need to grasp. Making such studies for dancers at beginners' level can feel like writing *haiku*, reducing combinations to essentials to avoid burdening learners with too much to memorise. Such tiny *enchaînements* aim both to introduce a particular technical skill by including chosen vocabulary, but also incorporate some sense of specific quality, style or performance context, through the simplest of ingredients.

This approach has provided opportunities to use phrases and fragments of dance material from repertoire. In one term a wintry theme with seasonal music by Verdi and Glazunov included a “skating” *enchaînement* inspired by material from Ashton's *Les Patineurs*, in another a Chopin themed class culminated in a waltz step and gestures from *Les Sylphides*. For the class documented for this research I devised an *enchaînement* inspired by an expansive movement phrase from the *Raymonda* Grand Pas, incorporating simplified versions of its steps and direction changes with Hungarian flourishes and gestures, generating opportunities to observe and discuss characteristics of this historic work. Without being a literal quote from the ballet's choreography, it endeavoured to give a sense of style and specific flavour which might distinguish the movement quality and emotional resonance from that of other *enchaînements*; and thereby draw learners' attention to the imaginative and expressive dimensions of even the simplest dance material. My aim is to enable dancers at this level to begin to see a connection with choreographic repertoire, situating their technical study in a continuum of development within an artistic and performing tradition; and to reward what can be mystifying and painstaking work by ensuring it culminates in an opportunity for enjoyable dancing that relates to ballet's choreographic heritage. In interview students from this class showed their awareness of the link between what they were doing and what they saw in professional performance:

“I did find myself going to – erm, *Sylvia*, actually watching little bits and going “ooh, that actually looks like – if you just slice it there and there – we could do that! [laughter]... Take that little bit there, take bring that back to Susie – how we could do that -”

(Ch, SC Adult Beginners group interview @1hour 2mins 36secs)

“...that *Bayadère* [entrance of the Shades passage previously studied]– that was lovely [assent] when we did that, 'cos I loved the music and actually when you watched it on the internet... you could relate to what we tried to do!”

(C, SC Adult Beginners group interview @1hour 5mins 26secs)

It seems to me essential that even at the most elementary level of class the possibility of using ballet's knowledge to make dances should be communicated to all learners, and that the link between the technical material they study and its manifestation in choreographic works should be made apparent.

8.6 Bricolage and versatility: eclectic bodies

Learning ballet for pleasure away from the pressure of a formalised course or vocational context, untroubled by the exigencies of examination and audition requirements, probably makes it easier to experiment with ballet class content in the ways described above. Overtly making a connection in technical study with historic repertoire or performers, or giving opportunities to explore balletic material with specific stylistic inflections, can perhaps seem irrelevant for vocational students who readily admit that they are not aiming for performing careers in ballet. This aspect of study is consequently a lesser priority for hard-pressed teachers, working within limited time frames to ensure students meet the current requirements of potential employers who seem to value athletic “aesthetic competence” over stylistic sensitivity. Or indeed to prepare dancers for today's culture of independent project working and moving across genres, increasingly the norm for dancers outside the few large supported companies. Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol have assembled a telling picture of the changing nature of professional dance training in the United States in *The Body Eclectic*, an edited collection of contributions from experienced dance educators and dancers. Some aspects of the situation differ from the UK, notably the significant role that universities play in professional dance training in the USA; and Bales' and Nettle-Fiol's

focus is mainly on the training of contemporary dancers. However the phenomena and trends in teaching that they discuss must resonate with the experience of many British practitioners.

Following the thinking of Elizabeth Dempster, Bales and Netti-Fiol identify two different approaches in the way professional dancers now structure their ongoing training activities. What they designate 'deconstruction' is a tendency towards choosing practices which concentrate on stripping away, going back to essentials; whereas 'bricolage' or eclecticism "connotes the layering of disparate practices..." to meet the changing needs of an independent dancer's portfolio of varied projects in juxtaposition (Bales & Netti-Fiol 2008 p2). Joshua Monten traces the growing eclecticism of contemporary choreography, and highlights the very real problems that this can pose for the dancer; who in the quest for employable versatility must now seek to reconcile the different physical requirements and bodily understandings of perhaps multiple dance and body techniques, and learn to be able instantly to override deeply engrained movement patterns:

"To the extent that a dancer's technical training is about making choices, about developing versatility, a diversity of training techniques is surely a boon. But to the extent that technical training is about instilling instincts – patterns of movement so consistent that the body can respond correctly in an instant – having too many training techniques can be quite problematic."

(Monten 2008 p61)

In this world ballet classes rub shoulders with body disciplines such as yoga, Alexander Technique or Feldenkrais, athletic practices such as gym sessions or running, or other dance genres such as contact improvisation, contemporary styles or ballroom. Post Judson Church and the developing interest in non-dancerly movement, the dance technique class has come to be seen more as "a way of staying in shape, not a system for designing bodies or a factor in the finished work" (Jowitt cited in Bales & Netti-Fiol 2008 p2); cutting the links between choreography and training for repertoire:

"...most interviewees reported that the model of choreographers training dancers in their style by teaching technique classes is no longer prevalent.

Rehearsals have become the training ground, with dancers selecting their own technique packages... There is more emphasis on learning by doing rather than learning in a technique class format and *then* doing. Some of the individuals interviewed... described their personal practices, working alone rather than engaging in the established dance tradition of “taking class”.

(Nettl-Fiol 2008 p169)

Yet if as Susan Leigh Foster writes “Training not only constructs a body but also helps to fashion an expressive self that in relation with the body, performs the dance” (Foster 1999 p241), what kind of “expressive self” are dancers constructing when they use for training a range of alternative techniques divorced from specific performative outcomes? The intention may be through their choices to nurture and protect a personal expressive code as an individual artist; but their choices can also be driven by the need to cultivate a chameleon-like ability to take on a variety of performance styles and aesthetics as required for employment; becoming what Foster identified as “a body for hire”, training “in order to make a living from dancing” (ibid. p255).

Writing in the USA in the late 1990s and comparing the different cultures and aesthetic values of different Western dance performance traditions, Foster saw the prevailing aesthetic shaping the dancing body as influenced by an agenda coming from physical education and sports science, measuring the dancer in terms of physical capacities and characteristics such as heart rate, strength, flexibility and muscle tone. Its homogenous style incorporated skills from different techniques without retaining the distinctiveness apparent in those dancers primarily schooled in a particular genre or tradition. Foster ends by suggesting that the dancers conforming to this trend are as stylistically bound as those formed in the defined dance disciplines (ballet, Duncan, Graham, Cunningham and contact improvisation) she had previously briefly profiled; foreshadowing Spatz' warnings as to the illusion of neutral technique:

“... both video and hired bodies appear as the products of an efficient and “unbiased” training program, assumed to be neutral and completely adaptable; as a result, they mask the process through which dance technique constructs the body.”

(ibid. p256)

Contemporary and independent dancers searching for versatility may reject technique classes adopting stylistic conventions associated with ballet's choreographic repertoire; and ballet class is instead commonly perceived as a type of fitness technique to be used as a tool:

“Studying ballet keeps your body in a certain condition and allows you to go into a lot of different techniques.”

(Janet Panetta interviewed by Netti-Fiol 2008 p236)

Arguably Anna DuB's classes at Danceworks are servicing dancers who will need to meet the pragmatic and versatile requirements of Foster's hired body; many finding employment in pick-up companies or for one-off events and temporary independent projects, rather than permanent company contracts where a shared vision and stylistic approach can be cultivated over time. The two professional performers interviewed (one from USA and one from Canada) had both travelled widely to find employment, OT dancing for brief periods with a range of companies in the US before settling in London as a freelancer. The ballet class here provides a “home” base for such dancers, in amongst an eclectic mix of training, fitness and performing activities. The familiar elementary content and structure of AduB's class serves as restatement and reminder of some balletic fundamentals in an eclectic and fast changing world, and allows for some individual stylistic diversity in execution. But the recent inclusion of a physical fitness sequence also reflects an acceptance of athletic physicality as a required stylistic feature for dancers in a commercially orientated employment world. Thus a ballet class increasingly adapts to the narrower role allotted to it of fitness training servicing other dance requirements.

8.7 Deconstructed training regimes and somatic approaches

In contrast to such 'bricolage' Bales and Netti-Fiol's volume also considers and profiles dancers who have taken the route of deconstruction in their technical training with a focus on somatic 'nondance movement practices' such as Alexander Technique, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement, Ideokinesis and Body-Mind Centering. These have come to the fore over the past thirty years "offering methods for repatterning, finding movement efficiency, or ridding the body of unwanted habits of movement." (Bales & Netti-Fiol 2008 p85). Chris Aiken voices a critique of habit in a contemporary context:

"We live in a society where there is a lot of stress, and having to be in a high alert state, but often, it never gets dissipated. How you deal with constant stress creates certain habits that are often holding habits in the body. And as they develop and continue, they actually increase in their dysfunctional effects on your body and your posture, so you create lots and lots of tension. In my work with the Alexander Technique, by having a teacher guide me back into my sense of poise, I am reminded of a more natural way of organizing myself in relation to gravity that's not emotionally-oriented or habitually oriented."

(Chris Aiken quoted in Netti-Fiol 2008 p118)

Netti-Fiol herself, first a dancer but later a fully trained expert Alexander Technique (AT) practitioner, writes a thoughtful account of her own experiences finding ways to integrate this new knowledge into her dance practice and teaching, and interviews other knowledgeable practitioners as to the nature of this way of conceiving of movement (Netti-Fiol 2008). While AT's virtues as an education of the body and the person into more easeful and efficient ways of moving are evident, profound questions are also raised as to how to place it within a dancer's training programme. How can a practice essentially operating in a hands-on one-on-one situation with a focus on attention to the individual be communicated and experienced in group classes? As has been shown, ballet classes have traditionally cultivated through repetition an instinctive access to movement; the reconciling and incorporation into them of a specific technical approach which teaches through the inhibition of automatic movement responses presents a practical challenge. As Netti-Fiol remarks:

"Especially in dance, where we work hard at "doing," at "correcting," and "doing

more,” it is difficult to insert the idea of non-doing.”

(ibid. p112)

AT practitioners are clear that AT is essentially a therapeutic technique primarily intended for use in rehabilitation from injury; but dance practitioners have begun co-opting it as part of their bodily training. In this context Netti-Fiol highlights the technique's potential value not as a specific movement vocabulary but as an analytical tool which can be used to improve any kind of movement through understanding of the appropriate use of effort, and to enable the dancer to cultivate an individual movement voice. Jackson in her wider discussion of the application of somatic approaches to ballet sees them as a complement to learning in a specific dance style, that will not substitute training to develop “the dancer's knowledge and the dance instrument of a specific form” (Jackson 2005 p31). Descriptive terms used by Netti-Fiol and her interlocutors suggest particular movement qualities and values associated with somatic practices: “softer edge”, “quicker”, “allowing”, “wholehearted”, “ease” (Nettl-Fiol 2008 p115). The cultivation of such qualities in training may be at odds with the muscular physicality required of the commercial dancer adapting to multiple tasks via an increased athleticism, or the ballet dancer developing ever more extreme skills of flexibility and virtuoso turns. But there is a potential synergy between related and fundamental principles such as ballet's ancient concept of *aplomb* and AT's plumb line; and it also prompts speculation as to the other aspects of ballet's vocabulary and repertoire which might fruitfully be supported by training programmes which included working with this approach.

Outside large ballet companies dancers emerge from vocational training into a world where their professional survival is dependent on their ability to adapt to a wide range of styles; and their continuing professional development and body maintenance must involve choices between very different training approaches in the construction of

personal programmes. It would appear that somatic techniques grounded in phenomenological perspectives and the felt bodily experience of the dancer now provide a persuasive alternative training philosophy to the objective approach of the sports scientist promoting the development of the dancer as athlete currently inflecting much ballet training. But whether coming from a phenomenological and experiential approach or an objectivist biomechanical one, these very different approaches have in common a focus on the physical body. This does not therefore make them neutral: while eschewing the inclusion of material that could be deemed specific to a genre, style or choreographer, in their development of very different physicalities, these approaches nevertheless reveal and potentially inculcate value systems which may manifest in distinct stylistic movement preferences. But if dancing is to be used in artistic creation the education of dancers through their embodied training needs to include consideration of the movement content and its execution as always replete with meaning and cultural significance; so that dancers become conscious in practice of the way values may be transmitted, and the expressive choices available to them.

8.8 To summarise

“The range of attitudes toward ballet as a form of training spans from deep gratitude to hardened rejection, from informed appreciation to nearly complete ignorance of its history or repertory.”

(Bales 2008a p7)

As the repertoires of major ballet companies become more diverse and admixed with work from contemporary choreographers coming from different dance genres, and with the rise of an eclectic independent and freelance dance scene, the question of the appropriateness of ballet's training and preparation for professional dancers becomes more acute.

Anna Aalten and some of the dancers interviewed by Netti-Fiol seriously challenge whether ballet's class fulfils the needs of today's dancers. Yet for many dancers, both

professional and vocational, a traditionally framed ballet class rooted in teaching practices developing and aiming towards mastery of the virtuosic highlights of 19th century classical repertoire, still remains the ultimate ballet training; a solid base providing not only physical fitness and mastery of complex skills, but also transferrable habits of discipline and detailed analysis, from which a range of other styles and genres can be explored. But it would appear that there is little questioning of the appropriateness of its stylistic and historic specificity to a wider range of repertoire both historic and modern; and the decision to accept or reject ballet class is rarely based on an informed sense of what it might, in addition to technical mastery and honing of the physical body, offer as investigation of artistic expression, through providing conscious access to a historic body of artistic work.

Examination of characteristics of the teaching of Balanchine as recalled and passed on by Suki Schorer shows how the class has historically been used to embed and cultivate ways of moving particular to a defined choreographic vision. But a pragmatic need to find a class that will serve all purposes has encouraged many teachers to pursue an ideal of stylistic neutrality in training, focusing on uninflected technical and biomechanical clarity in execution according to accepted standards, now most usually those predicated by the internationally accepted Vaganova method. However the classes considered here can all be seen to carry within them particular stylistic biases, which undermine any claims of neutrality in their presentation of ballet's core of technical and academic knowledge, the *danse d'école*; and suggest that the notion of a universal and objectively measurable *danse d'école* is an impossible illusion.

Ultimately the choice of technique class content, and indeed all dance training, is unavoidably stylistically inflected, whether consciously or unconsciously; carrying within it the embodied movement history of the teacher, their experience of performance and choreographed dances, their own dance or movement learning, and the knowledge

and values of the teachers that came before them. I think this potential multiplicity of individual perspectives should be consciously embraced rather than avoided in teaching. As Francia Russell puts it, “A good class has a point of view.” (Russell in Speer 2010 p125). But in a shifting world of independent and project work requiring adaptation and versatility many dancers seek ballet classes that are framed as neutral body and technical maintenance.

Constructing a ballet class is a process of compositional choices as to what aspects of ballet's knowledge to include or leave out, which will ultimately affect not only the physique and abilities of dancers but what is conveyed to viewers through their dancing, and what is perceived by an audience. Part of the technical knowledge imparted in the class over and above the mechanics of execution of certain skills and vocabulary, is understanding how dancing may communicate through the dance material chosen for study, and therefore the effect of performative nuances and stylistic choices on expression and beyond that audience reception. Beyond pressurized vocational contexts wider ballet teaching is beginning to explore closer connection between ballet's technical study and its diverse choreographic repertoire. In openly recognising and examining the historic roots and stylistic connections of their own interpretation and construction of ballet's *danse d'école*, teachers might begin to educate dancers as to the stylistic range and compositional choices potentially available to them as individual artists. Teachers might also find inventive and personal ways to connect the on-going practice of the ballet class with emerging repertoire and choreographic practice, to revitalize and carry forward ballet's shared body of knowledge. A widespread inability to connect in training with ballet's choreographic heritage deprives the ballet community and dancers of all sorts and levels of experience of a rich body of knowledge about dancing, not simply as a compendium of physical skills and steps, but as a form of artistic expression.

These discussions set the context for the next chapter, which addresses my third research question as to the contribution of the class to developing dancers as creative artists. Emerging from reflection on the classes observed, it looks at some pedagogic strategies in relation to the pacing of both classes and the dancing content within them, which may help to develop dancers' technical understanding of balletic material's expressive dimensions, further opening the possibility for individual performative and creative choices and decision making.

Chapter 9: Pace in class

Dance exists in space and time; and the ballet class can be seen as a composition of dance material within a finite time frame. Albeit classes are often of standard overall length and usually follow a conventional structural outline, time within the ballet class can be subdivided and used in very different ways with significant effect. This research has already tracked how in a process of historical evolution classes have got longer, in particular the barre work section, to accommodate additional and more complex exercises involving the whole body. This section looks further at the impact of different use and experience of time through variations in the pace of classes. Small and subtle variations in timing can have significant effect on the way dance material is experienced and understood in the class; examining how timing can alter perception may therefore provide clues as to how the class may be opened up for more creative and imaginative practice. Pace here can mean the speed of the class overall; either taking more time to cover less ground, or fitting a huge amount of material into a limited time, with impact on the balance of time spent in teaching and dancing. But it can also refer to the internal pace in *enchaînements* of the dance material itself. I look initially at class timing in its wider sense, gradually focusing in on the close detail of *enchaînements* and the conceptualisation of individual movements, their shaping through phrasing and emphasis; and consider the contribution of somatic perspectives to this aspect of ballet's learning.

This inevitably leads into consideration of the music's contribution to classes, and the relationship of dance and music in the teaching and learning of balletic material. It has been suggested that the historic shift from single line accompaniment to more percussive and harmonic piano has had subliminal effect on dancing in the class, reinforcing the notion of music as a hidden persuader that does more than simply

measure time and demarcate rhythmic structure. Paying more attention to its different layers of communication in class may open up possibilities for expression and creative collaboration.

Ultimately pace can also refer to the process over time of learning and achieving mastery in a particular discipline. The development of expert levels of practice has been shown to take 10 years, or in the region of ten thousand hours or more (Ericsson 2010 pp412 & 414); it is commonly held that to achieve a professional career in ballet takes seven to ten years of intensive study. For example, the Vaganova Choreographic School curriculum as outlined by Vera Kostrovitskaya provides a carefully structured and progressive 8-year full-time programme designed to take students through from the very beginning of their training to graduation into professional companies (Kostrovitskaya 1987). Anecdotally the existence of such a timescale is borne out by the experience of many of the teachers interviewed by Dean Speer (Speer 2010).

Despite such evidence of the potentially glacial pace of assimilation of ballet's body of knowledge, the reality for many UK vocational dance students is that they may spend as little as three years in structured full-time training. They consequently have to cover a lot of ground and absorb a lot of material in a short time in order to achieve an acceptable level of balletic competence for a career in dance. Faster pace in classes, necessary to cover a wide range of material while also maximising the repetitions that will engrain dance learning in the body, can mean reducing time for the full experience of dancing action and its in-depth study, for thinking and experiment. If the ballet class is to function as an artistic education, finding time and space in the class and its balletic content for the development of attitudes and approaches that would encourage using its technique and material in creative ways, is therefore a challenge to be addressed.

The classes I observed showed distinct variations in pace resulting in qualitatively different experiences for the dancers undertaking them.

9.1 Fast-paced classes

The Royal Ballet company class taught by Brian Maloney exemplified fast-paced professional classes. Most ballet classes at advanced vocational and professional level in the UK, while covering the same generic content categories, are longer than this daily company class of one and a quarter hours duration. Almost non-stop barre work repeated on both sides without break saved time for the multiple groups needed to provide opportunities for all dancers in travelling centre-work. Any corrections or teacher feedback were rapidly given to individual dancers while the dancing groups continued; the pause between one *enchaînement* and the next was the minimum needed to give dancers necessary instructions; on only two occasions did BM very briefly make a wider feedback comment about execution to the group as a whole. The class was therefore not about introducing these advanced practitioners to new ideas, or even engaging in technical analysis and study of specific material. It rather provided a framework within which each dancer could prepare themselves for the day's dancing; and for a few, some brief coaching feedback on details of execution. Class in this context can be seen as communal warm-up and orientation, and routine maintenance of body and technique through repeated practice. While individual dancers may find within it moments of opportunity to pursue their own priorities in autonomous study, its accelerated format provides little time for research, experiment, and exchange that might enrich continuing professional development.

Although longer, Anna du Boisson's class at Danceworks shared similar fast paced delivery of the class material, reducing the time spent not dancing to a minimum, particularly at the barre. As a very experienced teacher AduB demonstrated the

exercises clearly for maximum communication; the first time almost singing in the tempo she wanted and giving counts, neatly showing the leg action while keeping the legs low, but fully showing *ports de bras*, the second time rapidly giving names and counts while indicating with the hands to save time. At the barre exercises were done continuously on both sides. AduB walked around during the barre work observing and giving individual dancers personal corrections and advice, often hands-on; but she did also find moments between exercises to make brief general observations and recommendations to the whole group, for example on placement or line. These also included comments on timing concerning tempo, musicality and anticipation of forthcoming actions, such as these exhortations given while setting a rapid *battement tendu* combination:

“...and that's the tempo... OK? Come on, it's Friday!... you have to see the exercise ahead... you're living on the brink... I know I'm fast...”

(AduB class field notes 3/11/17 @ 1.17pm)

In the centre the class had to divide in half for *battements tendus* and *adage* and then into smaller groups following on continuously for *pirouettes* and *allegro*. The 10 minute strengthening sequence of floor work inserted after the barre reduced the time available for dancing *enchaînements*; so that despite being longer than the Royal Ballet class in total, the centre-work dancing part of the class was shorter, and only seven *enchaînements* were given (one *allegro* offering male and female options to the same music); consequently a smaller range of vocabulary was addressed. However, throughout AduB continued to give group as well as individual feedback and correction, both from a technical and an interpretative perspective, such as this advice given during work on the *pirouette* combination:

“When you finish the adagio you have to have a change of persona... it takes you too long to make that changeover...”

(AduB class field notes @2.08pm)

Thus despite a fast overall pace both the teaching and learning of the class appeared

mainly focused on improving the dancing, with more time spent on less material. The class provided opportunities for teacher feedback and for dancers to repeat, adjust and perfect execution; the 16 count *adage* sequence taking 7 minutes, the repeated 8 count pirouette phrase travelling down the diagonal taking a substantial 12 minutes. In interview AduB confirmed that she had given a very “general” class in order to be able to accommodate the range of people attending it, and ensure that all got something positive out of it (AduB interview @1min 30secs approx). The generic nature of the content communicated that the class was more about working on and practising familiar material already known to the dancers; and therefore perhaps less about expanding and challenging their knowledge through less conventional balletic vocabulary or combinations of movement material, which might have required more time spent in technical analysis and explanation. AduB seemed to have decided that devoting time to core strengthening, stretching and fitness is at the moment of greater value to her students than time spent in wider exploration of balletic dancing material through more *enchaînements*.

A fully developed ballet technique should encompass wide knowledge of ballet’s language and the ability to compose and articulate coherent statements using it. But the employment priorities driving the shaping of many classes seem to encourage a tendency increasingly to prioritise the physical, warming up and strengthening; rather than gaining a comprehensive familiarity with ballet’s steps, actions and positions and their multiple variants, or for artistic exploration of inventive combinations and the refining of execution in response to their technical and expressive implications. As has been noted, this tendency can be observed in recent development of teaching policies at the Royal Ballet School, with intention similarly to take time in the class for specific fitness activities (Laws 2018, p40). What may the impact of this trend be over time on the development of dancers’ knowledge and understanding of the wide extent of ballet’s vocabulary? Different structural contexts and relationships between balletic

elements can require both technical and expressive modification in performance. If time is reduced for exploration of the consequences of these variations and the potential choices to be made in their performance, dancers are less likely to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes for contributing in choreographic situations, or making use of their balletic knowledge in their own original work.

Laura Hussey's ballet class for LSC final year musical theatre students also adopted a brisk pace at the barre, consciously modelling the kind of fast and continuous professional classes described above, that students emerging into the commercial world could expect to experience once outside the vocational training environment, and in mass audition processes. Like AduB and BM, LH showed herself adept at communicating dance content fully through a combination of demonstration and commentary to give maximum information in minimum time; the content itself was similarly tightly packed. Of three *battements tendus* combinations and two *battement glissés* at the barre all were fast paced, some involving transfers of weight and alternation of the legs, one with a fast *rond de jambe* requiring quick thinking and coordination. Even at this stage in the class the intention seemed to be to show the students' capacity to assimilate information and move at speed, as would be required in audition:

"I'd like to see you moving at speed, there's never that in auditions where you do slow stuff is there, it's always quick stuff."

(LH, LSC class transcript p8)

As the class progressed more time was allowed for the teaching and correction of *enchaînements* in the centre, as befits students some of whom were less familiar with balletic vocabulary. LH did not simply set material but in demonstrating gave indications as to how to perform it, what to focus on and where technical pitfalls might lie. She built methodically on existing student competence in pirouettes by starting with a simple combination and then elaborating, enabling both repetition and development of this particular set of skills in varied contexts. This culminated in opportunities for

students to do 16 *fouetté turns*, and then in pairs a sequence of fast *posé* turns from the corner. It seemed that these last were regularly practised competencies, here demanded in the way that they might be given out as a challenge in an audition situation. But although some brief feedback was given, no time was spent on their technical analysis, despite the fact that some students visibly struggled with the *fouetté* turns. Despite the extended length of this class spending time on breaking down and reconstructing the *fouetté* action would have taken a lot of time given the large number of students.

In most classes there is an underlying imperative to ensure that representative samples of all aspects of ballet's vocabulary categories from barre-work through to allegro are addressed, allowing for, in Paskevskaja's words, "a full experience of the vocabulary at each lesson" (Paskevskaja 2005 p9). Maintaining a holistic and comprehensive balance of material in the overall dancing experience is valued and required by dancers, offering the chance to reconnect with underlying principles of movement. Finding the time to deconstruct particular material for in depth scrutiny may serve this broader aim implicit in the class structure; but is not an option always open to teachers outside structured conservatoire programmes, which can provide regular successive classes and additional dedicated coaching sessions. If the dancer's training schedule does not include separate opportunities for such analytical and theoretical practice, ways to modify classes need to be found to allow time to accommodate such study.

9.2 Slow-paced classes

Anya Grinsted's two-hour class for five vocational students could be seen as a model of how the class's structural framework and balance of content may be respected while providing opportunities for detailed work on specific passages of movement. Given

that 25 minutes was dedicated at the start of the class to the De Vos inspired conditioning exercises, the ballet class structure took the usual one and a half hours to cover. However, while following a conventional order of content, the amount of material covered was substantially less than in the classes cited above; fewer exercises (7 at the barre and 5 *enchaînements* in the centre), and none of the combinations was longer than 16 counts. There was no adage either at the barre or in the centre, although the *port de bras* that began the work in the centre featured a sustained *posé* in *arabesque* with controlled lowering through the supporting leg. There was only one *pirouette*, performed in *arabesque* as part of a repeated 8-count phrase. So although these ballet-focused vocational students were more advanced in their balletic knowledge and technical abilities than LH's musical theatre students, their class was significantly slower and sparser in the content that it covered, and did not include any conventionally virtuosic skills such as concentration on high extensions, travelling turns in sequence or *fouettés*.

However an observable characteristic of the dance material in the centre was that tasks were often complex in their combination of a variety of elements without repetition within a short compositional phrase. The *pirouette* featured stepping backwards into *chassé pas de bourrée* forward changing body direction before entering the turn; thus a sophisticated preparatory phrase initiating the turn through flowing movement. Within its 16 counts the allegro study nevertheless incorporated *glissades* both under and over, *changements*, *sissonne ouverte forward* and *fermée backwards*, *entrechat*, two polka steps, a *jeté* forward and *pas de bourrée*. Such *enchaînements* appeared more like snatches of choreography than exercises; finishing the sequence with a pose, ultimately in the final waltz a *port de bras* of the student's choice, and acquiring a distinctive character through their incorporation of gesture or the detail of their timing. So while eschewing spectacular feats the class material was demanding in its detail, requiring knowledge of a range of balletic vocabulary, and the ability to put

it together smoothly in shifting combinations finding a variety of body movement pathways. Focus on the combination of actions in short phrases, rather than repetition of isolated elements, may help to encourage an awareness of movement and transition in action, rather than definition of the dancing by shape or discrete steps.

To enable her students to master these phrases, AG allowed significant time for detailed learning, execution, analysis of the mechanism of the actions and repeating the *enchaînement* after thorough study: thus 7 minutes spent on the *pirouette* phrase, 19 minutes spent on the allegro study and 15 minutes on the final waltz. In conversation afterwards AG said that she would rather teach simpler material and really work on it; too fast a pace often left students without time to really feel or find the movement (AG class SC field notes on conversation).

This kind of deliberate pace with deeper focus on less material was familiar to me from Roger Tully's classes. In recent classes RT had frequently commented on the need for what he calls "pedantic" study. In his class documented for this research, following the preamble warm-up there were eight barre-work exercises and only six *enchaînements* in the centre (with a final *port de bras* with *reverence*). In contrast to the multiple *battement tendu* and *glissé* exercises in quick succession at the barre of other classes (LH's 3 *tendu* and 2 *glissé*, BM's 3 *tendu*, 1 *retiré*, 1 *jeté* and 1 *glissé*) there was only one of each. Unlike LH's successive *pirouette enchaînements* there was only one short *pirouette* phrase, like AG's involving a complex preparation to set up and release the *en dedans* turn. Being short, the majority of these combinations could be repeated after analysis and discussion for a more precise execution and a fuller experience. A simple sequence of *chassés pas de bourrées* thus became a study in the detail of efficient weight transference, flow, *épaulement* and nuanced gesture. Putting the microscope on this commonly used and often ignored step was revelatory as to its quality and function.

Paskevskaja supports this approach:

“We often equate “advanced” with “complex”; thus many steps strung together and performed at a fast tempo are thought to be more “advanced” than fewer steps at a slower tempo. But an advanced execution of the vocabulary *also*, and for me *rather*, manifests in the ability to address a greater number of details within any step or combination. Thus a simple combination that allows attention to detail can teach more than a complex one performed sloppily.”

(Paskevskaja 2005 p7, emphasis as in the original)

This chimes with sentiments expressed as to the slow nature of ballet's learning in

Dean Speer's interviews, perhaps summed up in his pithy quotation from Edward

Villella, “slower is faster” (Speer 2010 p176).

Bruhn and Moore reflected on the value and appropriateness of long *enchaînements* in Bournonville training:

“The old Bournonville classes always terminated with very long and complicated *enchaînements* for elevation. The Wednesday class included three of these, one of which lasted for 64 measures of music! (The average length for a male dancer's classical variation is 48 measures.) It is now generally agreed that exercises of this length are too exhausting to permit the pupil to concentrate properly on correcting his execution.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005 p51)

While suggesting that short discrete sections of such *enchaînements* could beneficially be studied separately for technical development, they also acknowledged the value of such lengthy combinations for more advanced dancers in potentially assisting the development of artistic skills of phrasing, shading, rhythm and timing:

“... how to seemingly minimize the importance of some steps in order to accent others; and how to use rhythm and timing to help them in sustaining a long and difficult technical passage.”

(Bruhn & Moore 2005 p51)

It might therefore be argued that expert dancers are less in need of slow-paced classes with their sometimes microscopic attention to relatively simple elements of vocabulary.

However Paskevskaja sees the value of company classes precisely in the opportunity

they provide for professional dancers to return to and reassert fundamental principles of movement “to address any compensation, shortcuts, or idiosyncratic use of the body that may have arisen in performance of the choreographic repertoire” (Paskevskaja 2005 pp7-8). Thus the content of class for such dancers potentially may be usefully concerned with the same issues as class for dancers of a less advanced level. This opens the intriguing possibility of classes able to accommodate dancers with a wide range of experience, through a focus on principles or themes shared and available to all at whatever their level of expertise. In such classes dancers can use common material in different ways to meet their own individual learning needs; encouraging a more independent approach to study rather than conformity to externally imposed standards. AduB’s class, billed as Elementary but attended by many advanced students and professionals, exemplified the appeal of this approach.

9.3 Somatic approaches to teaching ballet

Not only was the pace of RT's class slow in terms of taking more time to concentrate on perfecting less material; but at many points the elements themselves were taken at a slower pace, or the connections between them were given more time, to enable clarification and carefully detailed articulation of the body mechanism of each action. RT's 16-count *tendu* sequence at the barre included only eight slow *batterments tendus* in total. These were combined in a reversible phrase including a *demi rond de jambe*, *fondue* extension closing in a *demi pli  * and rising up in the body to straighten the legs. This was repeated even more slowly after discussion, and in my reflections after I noted that despite – or perhaps because of - its sparsity and slow tempo this exercise was extremely warming (RT class SC field notes). The greater length of time taken had enabled a more refined awareness of the internal actions involved in extending the leg that RT had drawn our attention to; leading to deeper and fuller sensation, and

more committed engagement of the musculature.

RT's instinctive teaching approach developed over years of practical experience here ties in with contemporary thinking emerging from research into neuromuscular responses and control, and the increasing use of somatic approaches in dance training. In an article which combines knowledge of recent science with dance teaching and somatic practitioner experience, Glenna Batson uses the *battement tendu* as an example of a focus for somatic study with ballet students, suggesting some tasks to enable them to understand what is involved in its execution. She paints an overwhelming picture of the sophisticated coordination of body processes needed for postural control in initiation of even the simplest movement:

“In order to balance, our brains must constantly update the status of our body posture. Yet, no one PC [postural control] “center” exists in the brain to do this job. Rather, a complex set of neurological and other processes interacts with the environmental conditions and the task to promote anti-gravity responsiveness for proper orientation, verticality and balance. Balance “emerges” from the interaction of multiple body systems, a confluence of at least 13 different systems at last count. Sensory integration of proprioceptive, visual and vestibular input, righting and equilibrium reflexes, biomechanical properties of musculoskeletal tissues and focused attention are just some of the processes that interact moment by moment to maintain balance... Postural control, then, is a lifetime achievement.”

(Batson 2010 pp7-8)

In the light of such a complex phenomenon Batson makes a powerful case for the use of somatic approaches in dance training; a practice which would encourage dancers to attend to the subtleties of inner body sensations in movement tasks, rather than striving to meet an outer visual image. Such practice requires shifting the focus from faster more complex movement tasks to simpler and slower ones, which would make possible awareness and control of motor processing, and enable dancers to identify unhelpful habits of motion or posture:

“A great deal of muscular action happens in every phase of movement – the conception, the intention to move, the initiation, the sequencing, the reversing, the descending into rest, and finally resting. Learning to attend to the sensations embedded in these different phases is the first step in the practice.”
(Batson 2010 p 9)

It would appear that RT in his teaching of ballet adopted an inherently somatic approach; this is identified by Jennifer Jackson in her reflection on her own embodied experience of studying ballet with RT, following an introduction to Feldenkrais technique with Jos Houben (Jackson 2005 p29). For Jackson, RT's concept that "you have the ideal body for your own dance – and your dance refines your ideal body" (RT cited in Jackson 2005 pp32-33) shifts the dancer's understanding to enable somatic exploration and enhancement of their dancing from within, rather than in response to an externally defined ideal. She vividly describes her rich experience as a ballet dancer liberated by this to hone her own dance in a constant on-going process of formation, with profound implications for lifelong learning and longevity of practice:

"I do not only *look* for feedback – in the mirror, at a teacher, at other ideal bodies. As soon as I release hold of the outside position/perspective on my dance, which is based in where and at what I look, I am released from the idea of an image as my feedback and can embrace what I feel and what I think conceptually. I can refer to the ballet vocabulary (eg. glissade) not as an existing thing, but as a code that indicates many ideas – for example, quality of movement, gesture with a clear beginning and end, multiple variations in direction, speed, position in space, in relation to other dancers, in relation to other movements, particular organization of body parts and physical forces to coordinate the movement in space. There are performed examples of the glissade that I can refer to and assess on a number of levels..."

(Jackson 2005 pp34-35)

Batson and Schwartz stress the importance of "non-doing" and time for rest in somatic training programmes, to allow dancers to pay attention to such vivid internal experience of their own bodies. They contrast this with a Western culture of rigour, which would often seem to imply "that life and work must be, by necessity, difficult, challenging, or uncomfortable" (Batson & Schwartz 2007 p48). Most dancers embrace a work ethic of extreme, repetitive and exhausting physical practice as a necessary route to achievement in ballet; yet somatic practice teaches that rest is necessary for the assimilation of new bodily learning, and that repetition without awareness builds and fixes habits, and limits options for change and progress. Studies on sleep and learning cited by Batson and Schwartz (Batson & Schwartz 2007 p54) suggest that intervals of 24 to 48 hours can enhance movement learning both in terms of the acquisition of skills

and their retention.

It should be remembered however that the skill tested was limited to a finger-tapping task, so it is open to question as to how these findings might be replicated and confirmed in the learning of dance's complex whole body motor skills. Yet in the condensed reality of vocational study, or the intensity of professional dance company and commercial scheduling, such "distributed" practice would, like the periodicity in training recommended by sports scientists, be almost impossible to guarantee. There is thus a potential conflict between the need for on-going repetition in the refinement of dancing, and allowing time for integration of new learning of complex and sophisticated movement to settle:

"Such aesthetically nuanced activities are only achieved through practicing movement (i.e., through repeatedly executing and refining neuromuscular coordination). And yet the nervous system needs time to formulate, process, and integrate experience."

(Batson & Schwartz 2007 pp53-54)

There would appear to be evidence that within the framework of the technique class allowing rest time for absorption, even at a micro-level, has the capacity to enhance the dancing on different levels. Batson and Schwartz cite the reflections of teacher Mark Heim teaching at American Dance Festival, whose integration of periods of rest within technique classes (admittedly two hour long classes) brought notable changes to students' practice:

"... perhaps this idea of allowing for rest and sleep shares more of the power with the students... *they* are in control of their bodies and the teacher is not there to force them to move if they don't feel like it.... I've noticed that by the end of the class, the students are dancing fully, both physically and emotionally. There have been virtually no injuries in the class, either..."

(Heim cited in Batson and Schwartz 2007 p53)

This decision seems to have engendered a greater sense of personal autonomy in those dancing. Heim's gesture of trusting the students to rest and engage when they felt ready to do so seems to have sent a signal that empowered and validated the individual; as does RT's acceptance of the diverse persons in front of him, and his

often repeated comment that he doesn't expect identical alignment, phrasing or timing from those dancing in class. This was echoed by Eric Assandri outlining his approach to teaching ballet classes for the Access course students at NSCD. Here “rightness” implies not visual uniformity to an external standard but grasp of the task set and evidence of understanding:

“... for me it's very important to make them understand that even if they are doing the same things, the same movement, the same steps – it's different; because everybody is different – so – one person may, may do the same movement and the same step as the other one, but it's two different people... And I want them... to understand that it's fine to be different as long as it's right... So I don't want them to think it's like an industry, like a mold; that everybody has to be the same, because then there's no more individuality, there's no more personality, and then is – it's not dancing! any more for me.”
(EA interview @14mins 20secs)

Somatic approaches therefore can be seen potentially to have a profound impact on the pace of study. It remains an open question as to how and to what extent they might practically be encompassed within the traditional format of the ballet technique class, given the tension between doing more and non-doing that Netti-Fiol remarked (Nettl-Fiol 2008 p112); but also whether such a conscious and potentially rational approach is, as Bourdieu suggests, inimical to the logic of practice operating below the level of consciousness. Former dancers of powerful technical strength, instinctive response, and discipline, such as Errol Pickford or Laura Hussey, would no doubt advocate instead the need for greater amounts of repetition to enable dancers to fully embody and experience aspects of the vocabulary. However other teachers observed already showed sensitivities to more internally focused ways of working, not only in their manner but in their choice and design of dance material and its timing; and were prepared to allow time for dancers to experience sensation more deeply.

9.4 Pace of the dance material

A closer look at one of the classes observed begins to reveal the purpose and effects of carefully judged pace, both of the class and the dance material studied, as an element in opening up students' perceptions and facilitating the execution of the material set; how time saving strategies and economies of content can be used to allow for slower deeper focus on particular elements. In EA's class (EA class field notes) it was evident that students already knew the barre-work; so that they could move continuously through this, with EA just giving individual corrections as they danced. Though relatively simple, most exercises were quite long, a sequence performed and then reversed and sometimes followed by an additional section and a balance; an expressed intention of EA being to build up students' stamina. Although little time was given to instruction or feedback, the slow and deliberate pace of the content gave time for sensation. Some exercises took the form of simple movements executed slowly and then speeding up in repetition, such as in *ronds de jambes*, and rises at the end facing the barre (reminiscent of the Bournonville barre's simple but gradually accelerating *battements tendus*). This pattern was also observable in a warm-up jump of *changements* in decreasing and increasing number performed in alternating groups, requiring students to stop and restart with increasing rapidity, an exercise to develop speedy reaction and anticipation.

In the centre the maximum length of *enchaînements* was 16 counts, giving time for plenty of repetition and more analysis and technical correction. While most individual corrections were about alignment and placing, or helping the least experienced to understand the mechanics of a particular movement or transition, whole group corrections often directed attention to timing and musicality. In interview EA communicated the importance to him of movement and musicality, to be accessed through awareness and use of breath from the beginning of dancers' learning:

“So the aim and focus is just to bring them the fundamentals of the technique... so that they know what is the basics... positions, the arms, the alignment, the posture, the directions... and then from this it goes into the use of breath for the use of the space around them... So just that the movement is not static in terms

of position, but – to try to make them understand that they have some position, but the movement is going – using the position... with the use of breath they are starting to understand the idea of suspending, of holding – of getting faster so that's getting to performance skills and musicality.”

(EA interview @29secs)

These students were diverse not only in their physicalities but in their previous experience of ballet; ranging from years in local ballet school to a mere 6 weeks with NSCD. A slow start was obviously essential for those learning for the first time; but EA also encouraged those with previous experience to see it as a chance to go deeper into what they thought they already knew:

“... when I started slower, at the start of the year, these experienced students they were telling me... “well, but we know that, so can we do something a little bit more challenging?” And I just told them “yeh, fine, fair enough, you know that, but then – I want you to find another way of doing it; because in doing this in another way, so maybe you are going to go to more in depth; so you are going to understand better the muscles that you are going to use; and then you are going to do the thing even better. So – and you are going to acquire another, another nuance, another dynamics - “ ... it brings into the perspective of performance skills and musicality... they were nice and they just nodded at the beginning, but - they were not convinced; but after one week and two they started to understand...”

(EA interview @4mins 35secs)

While *adage* was not included either in the barre or at the centre as a separate study, there was a sense of building to it through the inclusion of full body bends in *port de bras*, of *developpés* in the *port de bras* at the end of *ronds de jambe*, and a traditional stretching exercise with the leg on the barre. Slower exercises such as *port de bras* and *adage* were identified in other teacher interviews as opportunities for dancers to explore nuance of timing and interpretation, because dancers has more time to “think” and experience the movement:

“I think that more slower exercises allow for a focus to be placed more... So things like... an extended port de bras in the centre – that has a beautiful score, or – you know then you can kind of really talk about the intention, the artistry... they've got longer, they've got more time to think, haven't they?”

(Guy Burden interview @41mins 45secs)

Making the leap from mechanical execution to interpretation and performance in such moments can be experienced even by adult beginners:

“I think we can be very much led into thinking beyond the absolute basic technique by the way you would describe something; so this term that port de bras exercise – just liberated from the barre, off we go into the centre – and you always say “and this is our beautiful *port de bras*”... the first little bit of it doesn't demand any more technique than the absolute basic barre thing, except that you're doing a *port de bras* with both hands instead of only one... so just for that micro – you know, five seconds up to the full *port de bras*... I thought... we cannot rush this, we can actually add to the technique the little bit extra for that moment...”

(SGJ, SC Adult beginners group interview @57mins 6secs)

Slow effort, and linking adagio movement with requirement for the maintenance of balance and transformation of shape, are advanced skills which can be beyond the emerging capacities of inexperienced learners. One might expect that it would be easier for learners at an early stage to work more slowly, but in reality this can be excessively challenging until greater strength and body awareness have been acquired. In my own teaching experience I have sometimes found that attempts to make material more accessible by slowing it down have actually made it more difficult, in its consequently greater requirement for ability to sustain, for detailed articulation and in-depth understanding; and through the possible loss of a natural rhythm and instinctive coordination, which inexperienced dancers may bring to those simple and fundamental balletic elements that have their origins in folk dance. It is of vital importance for successful continuance of study that beginners should be able to enjoy a dancing experience in class; balancing what is already possible and comfortable with a reachable level of further challenge to enhance motivation (Ericsson in Ericsson ed. 2010 p416).

This therefore poses an interesting question as to what extent a somatic approach to teaching balletic material is feasible and appropriate at earlier stages in training; or whether a certain prior level of experience is necessary in order to be able to benefit from its slow-paced practice. With reference to my own dancing, I have speculated as to what might have been the effect of studying with RT much earlier in my career; but I

also wonder at what stage I would have been ready to experience and understand what I have learned from it much later in life. I would conclude that there is much to be gained from the enhanced focus and awareness encouraged by somatic attention to the experience of balletic action; but perhaps this is most usefully part of analytic study in learning and revising *enchaînements*, and needs at times to be put aside to allow a direct pre-reflective experience of the dancing of them.

9.5 Phrasing for the development of musicality

I have observed that a characteristic of RT's *enchaînements* is a tendency for the dance material set to start slowly and then pick up speed. This suggests a concept of balletic timing as measured by phrases, rather than by the rhythmic pulse or beat. The given sequence of steps, often initially set without a specific timing, must then be adjusted to fit within the finite phrase, while anchoring it to musical accents at key points. This open-ended response to the music presents the possibility for dancers to take personal decisions at a micro level about the relative timing of elements of vocabulary, and the dynamic of the movement which connects them, giving a range of subtle and personal options for the distribution of duration and emphasis within performance of the phrase. This implies seeing the class as developing the dancer as individual artist, rather than member of a uniform ensemble:

“... they don't do it all at the same time, but I don't expect you to do it all at the same time, I want to see how you... respond to the music within the enchaînement. If we were doing corps de ballet work then we would have to decide more or less when it happened; but as an individual, as an artist, you need to be free...”

(RT interview @4mins 20secs approx.)

Rather than steps fitting into a metric pulse, enabling similar and precisely defined execution of discrete steps on each iteration, timing by phrasing opens the possibility of infinite variation in performance; the primary concerns in deciding how the step is to be performed becoming its dynamic co-ordination, emphasis and relation to other danced

elements, rather than achieving visually defined shapes or positions. As Jackson suggested (Jackson 2005, pp34-35), experiencing this brings the realisation that steps can be variable in speed, size, quality, intensity, and energy; that there is not one overriding correct way to execute elements of ballet's classical vocabulary but many possible ways, adjusting to suit context, intention and individual, which inform the dancer's most appropriate choice. Musicality in the dancer could therefore be defined as the capacity to respond sensitively through the dancing to the propositions to be found in the music, adapting execution of the dance elements accordingly.

A heightened sense of the performative scope afforded through such musicality can facilitate the development of dancing of greater dynamic range – both slower, requiring subtle, sustained and detailed articulation of movement, but also faster, through the refinement of scale and emphasis. Such dynamic extremes require technical mastery of a high order. But as well as the potential for developing technical performance of brilliance and virtuosity, this practice also opens up the potential of the class as creative practice, by treating *enchaînements* not as technical exercises but as miniature expressive dances to be personally interpreted.

A powerful example of such integration of technique and artistic purpose, albeit in a different discipline, can be seen in Donald Schön's detailed account of musical master classes, in which experienced performers guide talented students towards crafting personal interpretations of established repertoire (Schön 1987 pp175-216). Schön's opening description of the process whereby technical ingredients are manipulated to expressive ends by the professional musician preparing a public performance, could be transposed to the professional performer in dance. But it also provides an analogy with the task of the dancer in ballet class (albeit on a daily basis and a more modest scale), interpreting the dance material provided by the teacher – in conjunction with the stimulus of musical accompaniment – to present a performance sketch of the day's

enchaînements, a tentative proposal for further study, discussion and refinement:

“He must discover the meaning of the piece given to him as a score, frame it by the decisions he makes, and realize it by physical manipulation of his instrument. His enacted decisions are moves that he may hear as faithful realizations of his intentions, errors to be corrected, or back talk that reveals surprising meanings to be adopted, together with their implications, in further moves. So the performer makes his ephemeral, temporally unfolding artifact.”
(Schön 1987 p175)

Though here working within tightly defined parameters towards interpreting existing works of repertoire, Schön's account clearly shows performers as not merely the executants of others' instructions as McFee has argued, but engaged in creating an “artifact” in the form of a personal performance – even when apparently learning by following precise instructions, and imitating. A master class with cellist Pablo Casals began by requiring the student painstakingly to imitate Casals' exact performance of a piece by Bach. Casals then to the astonishment of the young musician proceeded to play a completely different interpretation of the piece. As Schön in his analysis observes,

“The lesson is not that there are two right ways to perform the piece but that there are as many as the performer can invent and produce – each to be realized, phrase by phrase, through a precise coordination of technical means and musical effects, each to be achieved through painstaking experimentation.”
(Schön 1987 pp178-9)

Imitation here is operating at a deeper level; the student does not simply imitate the material and its execution, but learns through that imitation the rigorous analytical process of the experienced player. The mastering of technical elements and exploration of choices and their consequences will open up for the student the process for reaching improvisational and personal interpretation. Stephanie Jordan recounts a similar example when the legendarily musical Suzanne Farrell was rehearsing students at the School of American Ballet:

“Thus, she mapped out the steps of Gounod Symphony... then, for the run-through, said ‘Now do it again and do it differently than you did before.’ And then again, at the next run-through, ‘Do it differently from the way you just did it.’”

(Jordan 2000, p94)

A comparable process may be observed in the traditional practice of art students copying masterpieces of sculpture or painting, to discover through their own embodied practice how such works have been achieved. Those ballet technique classes which allow time for such exploration and promote attention to the interface between technical means and artistic ends through the investigation and manipulation of timing, would seem similarly to prepare the dancer in developing a capacity for such subtle, detailed and ultimately creative work.

9.6 The contribution of music

It is impossible to talk about the pace and timing of material in the ballet class without considering the crucial role of musical accompaniment in shaping the dancing. Ballet is rarely conceived of as happening without music, and a vital component of the ballet class is its musical element. While scholars such as Stephanie Jordan have analysed in perceptive detail the relationship between music and dance in particular choreographic works, and in the interpretations of these by major artists (Jordan 2000), it seems that less attention has so far been paid to the particular place and function of music within the ballet class; where arguably dancers must gradually acquire that nebulous and contested virtue 'musicality', regarded as a crucial component of artistry. It was disappointing that in the many contributions about dance training from current experts – dancers, teachers, academics - compiled in 'Ballet Why and How? On the role of classical ballet in dance education' there was so little mention of music (Brown & Vos eds. 2014).

This perhaps reflects a wider cultural inclination among ballet practitioners, who while almost universally acknowledging their appreciation of music and its contribution to the enjoyment of dancing in class, do not always seem much inclined to analysing exactly

how it is influencing their learning and what they do. I asked interviewees about their perception of the role of music in the ballet class to try to probe this particular relationship. Errol Pickford showed admiration and respect for the knowledge and skills of the specialist ballet accompanists he worked with, and certainly seemed to value the involvement of music and musicians in the training of dancers, seeing music as a way to engage young people's interest. Anna du Boisson was forthright in her insistence on the important benefits of live accompaniment, having built up a fruitful collaboration with highly respected pianist John Sweeney over 34 years (AduB interview). For her students, expert live musical accompaniment was seen as one of the big inducements for attending a particular class (AduB student group interview @23mins 27secs). Pat Clapton and Roger Tully also spoke warmly of their working interactions with sensitive and supportive musicians; and the musical theatre students at London Studio Centre seemed particularly aware and appreciative of the contributions of pianists to their classes and learning experience. But detailed examination is needed to see how the music-dance interaction in ballet class actually works in practice.

As has been demonstrated through the pilot class analysis, in most classes verbal input is only one part of the information the dancer is simultaneously absorbing through different senses, visual and kinaesthetic as well as aural. Present throughout the dancing, implicit in the teacher's communication of the dance material, and in the dancer's own practice and experiment, music is potentially hugely informative and influential in shaping the dancer's ideas and movement responses to a particular task.

There is far more to be said about the interaction of music and dance in the ballet class than can be achieved within the scope of this research; however the following points, which relate to the issues of pace already discussed emerged from the classes observed and corresponding interviews with teachers and participants, and potentially

have particular relevance to the development of creative behaviours in dancers.

9.6.1 Temporal structure through rhythm and melody

In ballet class music initially provides straightforward information about meter and rhythmic structure, also about tempo and pace. The dancer can map the detail of the dance sequence through the use of counts marking the metrical beat, which correlate, if not always with the music as written, at least with it as heard by the dancer. In setting the *enchaînement* the teacher can choose to draw attention to the visual; shapes and pathways through space in relation to the rhythmic structure. The dancer copies this from the outside, mapping the shapes to discover the line of movement. This “join the dots” approach gives a diagrammatic sense of where the dancer needs to be at a given moment, and how much time there is for a particular sequence of movements leading to a particular position. Counting can be a very useful tool in clarification of the detailed articulation of movement.

But the music also offers a broader framework in time against which to set the dance; requiring the dancer to think and experience dancing less in terms of poses and steps and more in terms of phrases of movement aligned with the musical phrase, often relating to the length of a breath. The teacher might explain the *enchaînement* as a phrase of linked actions and intentions. This implies that the dance is not so much made up of discrete steps and positions, but of lines of movement which generate shapes through which the dancer passes.

Both ways of presenting the dance material may resolve into the same position at the same time, but the focus of attention is different; and the second approach allows for greater flexibility of timing, overlapping and continuity, and idiosyncrasies of phrasing to suit the individual – and the music. One could perhaps think of counting as relating to rhythm, and phrasing to melody. Roger Tully colourfully explained how a balanced

relationship between these two can be made visible through the dancing:

“... there's the melodic line – and there's the rhythmical structure. So you get [sings accented] rrum parum pa ti tarum pa ti tarum – and you need both, because otherwise you get [sings slurred] ummanana ummanumm – or you get [sings gruffly] dyum padum, parrm padum – and so it is this combination... and therefore the audience see both the, the movement in space, but they also see the space, er, see the shapes as well, and it's that lovely combination of that – and a good pianist is able actually to play both, they're playing both.”

(RT interview @10mins)

Thus a balance between rhythmic underpinning and melodic flow might be seen to promote musicality as a highly desirable characteristic of expressive dancing.

In the 19th century and earlier the dancing master generally accompanied dance lessons on a violin. Kyoko Murakami examined the historic process of change whereby control and choice of musical content by the fiddle playing ballet master teacher was increasingly delegated to an independent musician (Murakami 2003, 2005). In 1915 on heading the Bolshoi's ballet school, Russian choreographer Gorsky banned the violin; changing class accompaniment from the melodic line of the stringed instrument to the percussive mechanism and harmonic chords of the piano. The move to use the piano seems to have been cultivated in larger institutional settings – the conservatoire (the Bolshoi) or the teaching organisation (the RAD, and shortly after the Cecchetti Society); the examination syllabi of what is now the Royal Academy of Dance provided piano accompaniment from 1921.

Murakami revealingly compared the flexible single line of the fiddle tradition of class music preserved by Cecchetti into the 1920s, with the thicker harmonies and pronounced rhythmic pulse of the same piece, once piano accompaniment became established as the norm and was adopted in independent studios and local schools. Cecchetti himself also whistled; and a last bastion of the melodic line was the studio of Roger Tully, where until recently one could still hear sung or whistled accompaniment in professional classes, as RT himself had experienced in classes with Crofton and

Idzikowski (RT interview @12mins 33secs). Murakami suggested that a more percussive rhythmic style grew out of the shift to piano that has become even more exaggerated today; a tendency RT concurred with (RT interview @11mins 26secs). As ballet bodies strove at the turn of the 20th century to emulate the gymnastic physique of Sylvie Guillem, classes inevitably stressed the physical training aspect to “become more of a body building exercise class”; and Murakami perceived class accompaniment responding, moving away from the lighter more lyrical phrasing of earlier times to “army command-like music” (Murakami 2003 p26).

Paulette Côté-Laurence conducted an exploratory study on the importance of rhythm in ballet training (Côté-Laurence 2000). The five advanced ballet instructors observed and interviewed certainly projected a sense of rhythm as having a dominant role in the definition and development of musicality and technique in ballet dancers, and the importance of developing precise “correct” and “proper” execution through accurate timing. But although similarly convinced of the importance of rhythm in the relationship of dance and music, Jordan in her discussion of parallelism or music visualisation strongly contests such rigid adherence to the beat:

“The variations of energy in dancing around which a dance phrase is built are what make the dance interesting and alive: and they correspond to a muscular sense, not to an auditory one... Keeping time at all costs destroys the instinctive variability of emphasis: it destroys the sense of breathing in dancing, the buoyancy and the rhythmic shape of a dance phrase...”

(Jordan 2000 p77)

Despite the focus on rhythm, Côté-Laurence acknowledged that there is more to the development of musicality in dancers than simply an ability to synchronise the steps with the musical beat. Revealingly, students were observed to have most difficulty with slow-paced movements in adagio, where perhaps a greater focus on the melodic line rather than counts could facilitate both technical execution and flow of movement (Côté-Laurence 2000 p182). There are many statements that can be questioned in this study, not least defining what constitutes ‘correct’ performance and ‘proper’ training

(ibid. p187). But also its starting point, drawing on the suggestion she attributes to Copeland and Cohen, that “in order for dance and music to go together they must share the same rhythmic structure” (ibid. p174), would seem to ignore the ground-breaking developments in choreo-musical relationships in the 20th century. These began with the Ballets Russes, and culminated in Cage and Cunningham allowing dance and music to co-exist independently in the same space and time, profoundly influencing dance-makers coming after (Jordan 2000). With the increased number of works by contemporary dance makers joining the accepted canon of ballet company repertoire, the largely subliminal musical training of dancers in the ballet class perhaps needs to take more conscious account of recent developments in musical thinking; and in the freer dance-music relationships that have emerged from this.

The rhythm of some traditional balletic vocabulary is also more subtle and sophisticated than today’s percussive accompaniment might suggest. Ballet as a dance genre has historically drawn on and developed the vocabulary of European folk and social dances, with their distinctive rhythms and instinctive physicality mirrored in the development of varied musical forms often taking their title and inspiration from such popular dances. Emphatic uniform downbeats marking a constant pulse can obscure and distort the subtle timings of this material’s lilting, gliding, bouncing and airborne actions; and consequently change the quality and dynamic of steps. If these are to remain accessible to dancers as part of their palette of dance movements, understanding of their inherent co-ordination and timing needs to be instilled with the aid of appropriate musical accompaniment. Once such co-ordinations are internalised by the dancer, they can potentially be summoned independently of the music, working in freer relationship or across it.

In line with Murakami’s contention, a strong emphasis on rhythmic underpinning was identifiable in Brian Maloney’s class for the Royal Ballet dancers. The effect of the

rhythmic drive on allegro work emphasised by BM's continuous commentary could be seen in dancing to a constant metric pulse, equalising the importance of steps and with defined shapes underlined by being tied to the beat. In the allegro *enchaînement* already mentioned (see Chapter 8.3) the *glissade* preceding a *jeté*, in one of classical ballet's most common composite steps, emerged almost as a jump in its own right. Rather than acting as a linking move to propel the airborne *jeté* it ended with downward emphasis on its finish, losing along the way the quality and character originally embedded in its terminology – *glissade*, a gliding. Meanwhile a following *pas ballotté*'s extended *arabesque* landing on the beat, often executed over 90° in height, put the emphasis on this position rather than the complex action of the *ballotté* jump, retracting one leg and unfolding the other while in the air (RB class transcript 00.54.30-00.57.46). BM's personal and enthusiastic rhythmic response, and obsessive contribution to the musical sound-world provided by pianist Paul Stobart during the dancing, appeared to override the possibility of other individual musical interpretations and phrasing.

Such an interpretation of this *enchaînement* communicates an aerobic exhilaration in its mass execution, and potentially develops stamina and precision of articulation; but ultimately imposes a uniformity and lack of light and shade, and in its emphasis on static shape precludes attention to the different qualities of the movements that are implied by the terminology – tossing, throwing, gliding. There is a danger of the dancing increasingly being defined by visually standardised steps, for which the terminology merely provides labels, rather than instructions for distinctive qualitative actions and images to be interpreted by the dancer. In dancers of the Royal Ballet's level of expertise, with much knowledge already internalised, this may not be a problem; but I would question this approach for students in the process of coming to terms with ballet's vocabulary of concepts, qualities and actions.

Laura Hussey similarly made use of rhythmic vocalisations in setting her allegro study,

articulating the rhythm of footwork, rather than the line of the phrase or quality of movement, in the way she presented the material (LSC class transcript pp55-56). This perhaps subliminally connected to the highly articulated rhythmic emphasis of tap, jazz and street styles that her musical theatre students need to be conversant in, and was useful in terms of helping them memorise a sequence while working out its mechanics and transitions; but it gave little sense of the differentiated nature of the specific actions encapsulated in the combination. However she did also encourage her students to sing along to the fast waltz “Favourite Things” as they crossed the room in a *temps levé* step, the dancers thus experiencing this exhilarating *enchaînement* both through their voices and bodies, an inner impulse driving both singing and dancing and evidencing the visceral connection between them as modes of expression. At NSCD Eric Assandri occasionally teaches with percussion or guitar, but he admitted to preferring the piano for its greater resonance and potential for melodic line:

“But with, with the piano... then there's still the resonance... of the music, so there's the lyrics, the melody... well sometimes I tell them “you know it's just like you all have a favourite song... you all know the – the lyrics, but – when you sing it, sometimes you adapt it to yourself. So that's your personality; so do the same in ballet. So the steps are the lyrics; the music is the music; there's the musicality; and then so use your body – to change the lyrics...” “

(EA interview @52mins 30secs)

Here dancing might be seen as “singing with the body”, as lyrical and melodic, opening the way to heartfelt personal engagement and immersion, and reflected in LSC student enthusiasm. As a counterbalance to the emphasis on rhythm and beat so prevalent in current popular music, ballet classes need to provide sufficient opportunity for dancers to experience melodic line, if a rich and sophisticated musicality is to be developed.

9.6.2 The ballet class as musical multimedia

Over the course of my career there has been further change in ballet class music, from live piano accompaniment to recorded, and incorporation of a wide range of different musical genres. With its format of numerous short dances and need to cover an extensive selection of vocabulary ranging in size and speed, the ballet class calls for

pianists to have a wide knowledge of music from which to take or adapt short repeatable extracts. As well as light 19th century ballet music by lesser-known composers Murakami lists classical and romantic pieces by Schumann, Brahms, Beethoven, Strauss, Chopin, Tchaikovsky etc. in syllabus music for RAD and Cecchetti in the 20s and 30s (Murakami 2005 p155). Current class CDs and pianists add to this not only 20th century classical music by such as Bartok, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Ravel, but also hits from musical theatre, variety hall ditties, pop ballads, jazz, film scores, many with more pronounced beats. The use of electric pianos on some recordings and in some ballet schools can also accentuate the percussive and therefore rhythmic aspect of the piano.

What may be the subliminal influence of such further shifts in musical content on the way classical dancers interpret dance material in the class? The relationship with music in the ballet class brings another expressive dimension, and potential for altering the inflection and perception of dance material in execution. In addition to its information about temporal structure ballet class music also offers suggestions about quality of movement, emotional content, alternative phrasings, emphases and intentions, to flesh out a basic movement sequence provided by the teacher; potentially generating an imaginative environment within which the dancer can respond and form a particular interpretation of the dance.

Some revealing comments in interview implied that music in the ballet class is very much valued for its wider contribution to making the dancing meaningful and expressive. Errol Pickford suggested that for older students on the verge of adult life the emotional charge of music becomes more important, giving them a chance for the expression of feeling (EP interview @15mins 27secs). Laura Hussey's students confirmed the exhilarating effect of dancing to music that meant something to them; hence the pop ballads and musical theatre songs that LH favours in her class because

students will recognise and engage personally with them (LSC student group interview from 36mins 51secs). Pat Clapton similarly used musical theatre melodies because her students were able to recognise and associate with them (PC interview @1min 10secs). Conversely, because of powerful personal associations with previous experience, LH actively chose to avoid the use of specific ballet music to accompany her classes (LH interview @38mins 55secs).

Nicholas Cook in his analysis of musical multimedia dissects examples of film, commercials, music videos and opera, to uncover how music, words and visuals interact to construct meaning in these multimedia forms (Cook 1998). For him multimedia can be understood through the model of metaphor; whereby the attributes of one of the media are transferred to the other, creating new meaning. I know from choreographic workshops how interestingly the perception of dance material can be changed by setting it against different music, both from the dancers' kinaesthetic perspective and the experience of the viewer. The ballet class can be regarded as an example of musical multimedia – where the properties of the music affect the dance, and the properties of the dance influence the music.

As a tiny example, in my field notes taken watching Anna du Boisson's class I recorded the discernable interaction between music and dance in an unseen *grand battement* exercise. The improvising pianist responded in the moment to a finishing flourish by playing a *paso-doble*, which in turn encouraged the dancers to bring a Spanish flavour to their interpretation of the movement. AduB's student JM later gave a glimpse in interview of how her interpretation of *enchaînements* was shaped in instantaneous response to live music:

“... I find it's emotion and also the accents that they bring... you can play with, and that's where your interpretation can come in a lot... because someone else will hear the music differently to the way – to what I hear and I think that's where those subtle things come in... how you move your weight especially for – I find that in allegro, where I find it's really important, the accent, and the music... directs the weight of your body...”

Her thinking in response to the music seems similar to the reflection-in-action Schön observed in the musical master classes; the juxtaposition of personal interpretative choices and mechanical considerations, here as to the placement of body weight, suggesting an unavoidable integration of technique and artistic intention in dancing.

Following discussion in a recent class I was struck by the opinions of two American dancers as to the role of music for them in dancing. These two had extensive performing careers in the USA where the influence of Balanchine on ballet remains pervasive, his works often seen as supreme examples of the visualisation of music. For one, music was “the motivator of meaning”, for the other “the dance is about what the music is saying”; implying that the dance is subservient to the expressive imperative of the music. This is very much the view espoused by Roger Tully, whose interview foregrounded from the off the importance of musical timing and structuring:

“I think in a way the music is the motivating force – I mean, to me, there is no dance without music; I know people do dance – you know, choreography without music, and – it sometimes is interesting... but it always implies a musical structure... even if there's no actual music...”

(RT interview @13mins 58secs)

Such a view of the dance-music relationship would indeed apply to the interpretation of a specific Balanchine choreography; but to what extent is it an appropriate approach in a technique class where the movement task is frequently set before the music; and the primary purpose of an *enchaînement* may be the understanding, execution and clarification of a specific sequence of movements?

Cook's concept of multimedia may suggest some different models for conceptualising the relationship of dancing and music in the ballet class. In his discussion of iconic examples from film Cook points to the distinction made by Eisler in the relationship of music and other media between “parallelism”, in which the different media reinforce the

message through their similarity, or “counterpoint”, in which the different media send contrasting messages (Eisler cited in Cook 1998 p62). RT's interest in the continuing dialectic between rhythm and melody opened a productive space for expressive variation and choice in the performance of *enchaînements*; and some dancers of their nature respond to the music in ballet class with more nuance and individuality. But there is a danger that an over-faithful adherence by the dancer to the music's temporal structure (potentially observable in Brian Maloney's class) excessively imposes the parallelism also known as “Mickey Mousing” (Jordan 2000 p74), making performance predictable and lacking in expressive dimensions and depth.

In class the dance-music relationship model should perhaps rather be seen as that of partners in improvised dialogue; the dance a proposal in movement to which the musician responds, making suggestions either supportive of the dance instruction or in contrast and contradiction. Considering the dancing as soundless singing by extension casts the dancer as musician, suggesting a more proactive role in the creation of the dance's musical structure in time. The sophisticated percussive footwork of flamenco and Kathak dance, two forms which consistently integrate dance with live music in performance, suggests a contrapuntal relationship where the sound generating dancer becomes one of an ensemble of musicians; not so much following or imitating as providing a different voice, both heard and seen, incorporating lines of movement to the multimedia counterpoint that members of the audience experience. Cook's models of multimedia suggest a range of possible interactions of conformance, complementation or contest (Cook 1998 p.ix) between equals, rather than the dance taking a subordinate, responsive role.

Of course such a dialogue is limited when one of the partners is an inflexible recorded accompaniment. Albeit recordings are made by immensely experienced dance pianists drawing on their accumulated practical knowledge of ballet class requirements,

the specific impulse of today's *enchaînement* is unknown; and ensuing conversation is closed. In interview Anna du Boisson was adamant about the superiority of training involving live musical accompaniment in fostering intuitive musical response, claiming that she could spot a difference in young dancers who had learned with live as opposed to recorded music (AduB interview @36mins 4secs). In an era of widespread use of recorded music the onus is once more on the teacher to make an apt, stimulating and supportive musical selection; but even then without the former violinist-teacher's immediate choice of and control over expressive phrasing, potential for rubato and subversion of meter, and the personal dimension of instantaneous collaborative response in the moment.

Despite the apparent freedom of choice that use of recorded music would seem to offer, most ballet teachers still work with traditional piano accompaniment tracks, although some have experimented with using compilations of popular music tracks. With a wider team of musicians on call for contemporary as well as ballet classes, Northern School of Contemporary Dance provides occasional opportunities for students to experience dancing balletic material with accompaniment from percussionists, or as with the class I observed a guitarist; bringing a different inflection and contemporary resonance to *enchaînements*. A potential benefit of recorded music is the opportunity it might bring to explore ballet's vocabulary and concepts in relation to a far wider range of musical sound-worlds and musical structures. In my own recent choreographic practice I have explored the juxtaposition and development of classical ballet vocabulary in the form of developing classroom *enchaînement* material with freer arrhythmic musical forms and improvisation, and found that this has both constructively thrown fresh light on balletic technique, and suggested new expressive potential.

Rachel Duerden reflects on both the natural affinities and the "subtle divergences" between dance and music and the ways in which they can reveal each other through

metaphor, borrowing Roger Scruton's image of "the imagined space of music" as contrasted with the "real space" of dance performance:

"To invoke the idea of music in its 'imagined space' and dance in its 'real space' is an invitation to perceive each medium in terms of the other, and to reflect on the potential transfer of attributes between them that a metaphor entails."
(Duerden 2007 p74)

Duerden analyses this at the level of highly specific musical and dance gestures by looking in detail at short sections of two works by choreographers of admired musicality; Balanchine (the Bransle Gay solo from *Agon* that Guy Burden's students at RAD were studying), and Mark Morris (the Bourrée from *Falling Down Stairs*). Her subtle analysis in these examples of the way dance and musical elements reflect each other, playing with relationships which use both their "likeness and un-likeness" (ibid p73) to draw attention to specific qualities and meanings, suggests the rich learning potential in study of music and dance relationships, not just as they manifest in established repertoire, but as they unfold in the ballet class at the scale of the *enchaînement*:

"It is revealing to focus on very small moments, because the richness of dance-music relationships is found at the microscopic level just as much or even more than at the level of larger structural elements, although it is surely there as well."
(ibid. pp80-81)

9.7 To summarise

Observation provides examples to back the contention that manipulation of the subdivision of time within the ballet class, both in the structuring of its sequence of *enchaînements* and the specific elements within them, profoundly affects how balletic material and concepts are transmitted to dancers. Not only is this important for the assimilation, understanding and refinement of technical knowledge and performance of ballet's vocabulary of movement; but also for the development of attitudes and approaches which may enable imaginative and creative practice in interpretation, and the construction of fresh choreography.

A comparison of faster and slower classes would suggest that in reaching these goals “less is more”, and a slower approach which allows time for fuller experience can ultimately bring important benefits not only for technical surety and competence but also for the development of varied individual expression. In such practice technique can be revealed as necessarily and inextricably intertwined with artistry. The technical implications of artistic intentions and choices can be revealed, as can the inherent qualities of material that emerge through its precisely articulated execution; and practical ways can be investigated to meet expressive requirements. Through such experimental practice dancers can cultivate dispositions to explore and play with their ballet knowledge, finding new connections and uses for the elements they study; thus taking a vital first step towards developing confidence and creativity. The ballet class might therefore not simply provide physical training, but rediscover a role as a research laboratory for ballet’s on-going creative and performance practice.

In his discussion of modes of professional education Schön’s accounts of master classes provide detailed analysis of one-to-one interactions between established musicians and apprentice learners in specifically focused sessions preparing for public performance. These are very different in format from the generic ballet technique classes taught to large student groups in formal training establishments such as London Studio Centre, the Royal Academy of Dance, Elmhurst Ballet School, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, or company and open classes catering to professional dancers. Institutions bounded by official standardised systems and expectations are likely to embrace conformity to perceived norms in their desire to ensure successful transition to professional employment for their students. Feeding a form which continues to require the unison dancing of a 19th century corps de ballet, such classes and the training systems that underlie them can tend to promote the development of regimented uniformity rather than of individual artistry. Independent studios away from

the immediate pressures of assessment and commercial employment or a vocational agenda are more able to provide smaller intimate classes more in the manner of the musical master class, embracing slower modes of learning. Teaching in such classes would seem to be closer to phenomenologically based somatic approaches to dance learning increasingly informing a wide range of contemporary dance practice; rather than the trend towards developing greater athletic and gymnastic abilities which influences much work in the ballet and commercial dance sectors. The challenge in today's fast-paced culture is to find ways for slower modes of learning to be more widely absorbed and accepted within mainstream ballet training.

The ballet class may often seem hermetically sealed in the dance studio; but its relationship with music has the potential to open a window onto a wider world. Music can be seen as the water that dancers as fish unconsciously swim in, instinctively responding, but often unaware of its contribution and hidden persuasion. Cultivating personal choice in the temporal structuring of their dancing, and a greater consciousness of the musical environment, has the potential to contribute importantly to dancers' wider education. It would help to bring awareness of the artistic and cultural context in which their work is situated, and the consequent possibilities for its change and development through strategies for interaction with other arts.

Experienced teachers are keenly aware of the added enrichment provided by the luxury of live musical accompaniment, and its potential to foster a sense of conversational interaction between performers in the moment, a vital starting point for development of the choreographic practices of improvisation and collaboration. But in addition, consideration of the implications of paying closer attention to timing and pacing in class has suggested that there is a rich body of technical, psychological, cognitive and pedagogic knowledge in the sister field of music from which ballet might fruitfully learn and borrow, to enhance the education of dancers as artists.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

My conclusion restates my three research aims and questions, as a focus in drawing together ideas and insights emerging from theoretical analysis as well as data collected on current practice in the ballet class. I summarise my understanding of ballet as a distinctive form of embodied learning. I put forward conclusions emerging from the discussions generated by field research, as to behaviours and approaches which might be nurtured in the ballet class; to engender an environment not only for training and the transmission of ballet's savoir-faire, but more broadly for an artistic education which would encourage the development of creativity within the form.

- **To unravel what happens in the ballet class; how is balletic knowledge transmitted to the individual, and how are technical and artistic concerns brought together in class content and teaching?**
- **To document, discuss, and evaluate examples of current classes; what are their aims and purposes, and how are classes influenced and shaped by historic context and present circumstance?**
- **To consider how ballet classes might inhibit or encourage the cultivation of interpretative and choreographic abilities, of dancers as creative artists; and the teacher's role in this endeavour.**

10.1 The oral and embodied transmission of ballet

In answer to my first question this research has built a picture of the ballet class as having affinity with ancient oral traditions of learning in epic poetry and popular or folk music, and the transmission of craft mastery. In such traditions learning is achieved not through the rational application of theoretical knowledge but through embodied

practical experience involving imitation, repetition, memorisation and performance, through long absorption and the unspoken logic of practice that Bourdieu has so comprehensively explained (see Chapter 3.5). In the ballet class didactic instruction is only one contributor to a learning experience in which the teacher's educative role involves multi-modal communication and demonstration, coaching, modelling of behaviours and mentoring; and where dancers also learn from their colleagues. The transmissible knowledge of ballet's technique has been passed from one generation to the next via this informal system of apprenticeship, whereby learners in shared classes are gradually absorbed into a broad community of fluid, evolving practice; continuing a traditional format for the development of professional education apparent not just in ballet but in other disciplines (see Schön 1987).

From an initiation through what might be dismissed as rote learning dancers gradually acquire deep experiential knowledge of ballet as a form; constructing a personal bodily understanding and perspective, the ability to access complex movement skills in the moment without conscious and rational instruction, and spontaneously to recombine those actions within acknowledged structuring conventions. We have seen how ballet's shared body of knowledge has adapted in response to creative experiment by choreographers, and to wider cultural forces and influences, and how the class feeds technical innovation back into creative and performing practice (Chapters 7 and 8). Extrapolating from Ben Spatz' dictum (Spatz 2015), if technique is ballet's knowledge, the class is the practice where this knowledge can be researched and developed, both individually and communally.

Concerns have been raised over trends in ballet's recent history as to the limiting effect on dancers' learning of the unconscious habitus, the docility induced by authoritarian and abusive teaching, the systematisation and stratification of technique, and a reductive focus on bodies engaged in mechanistic athletic performance (Chapter 1).

But study of research in other disciplines (Chapter 3.6, 7 & 8) suggests ways for dancers to survive the arduous and lengthy training that ballet's vast body of knowledge requires without losing individuality in performance. Conscious learning strategies of deliberate practice (Ericsson 2010) and reflection in and on action (Schön 1987) can be constructively combined with the necessarily slow pre-reflexive acquisition of physical and personal embodiment, in the quest for the mastery of technique and development of artistry and understanding. This could be discerned in some of the painstaking work of teachers observed through this research. Such approaches help to foster the development not only of “the thinking dancer” and intelligent competent performer, but also the imaginative artist who may go on to contribute to ballet's heritage as inspirational interpreter or maker of new dances.

10.2 Class aims and purposes

As Chapter 6 explored, beyond pragmatic preparation for professional employment, and bodily maintenance and fitness, there are many aims that the class needs to satisfy; to acquire practical expertise and knowledge of ballet's wide vocabulary of movement actions in multiple combination, to begin to understand how these may relate to music, and how they may be modified for expressive nuance in performance. Class does not therefore provide a place or time for dancers to make new dances. But it is a place where dancers may acquire the habits and behaviours of artists that will be needed for the development and performance of new choreography. I return to Sylvia Faure's analysis of two disciplinary cultures in dance classes (Faure 2000 p118, discussed in Chapter 3.8), as a framework for a final summary comparison of some of the classes observed, evaluating to what extent they may have fulfilled this wider educational aim – which remained generally unacknowledged, even when underlying or informing teachers' practice.

The need to prepare students to conform to external criteria for commercial employment as dancers could be seen as vitally important in the classes at both Elmhurst, where Errol Pickford strongly transmitted to his students a traditional *danseur noble* persona, and London Studio Centre, where Laura Hussey “uniformed” her students, preparing them to be able to meet a widely accepted baseline of generic skills. They followed Faure’s “logic of discipline” in the ballet class, working with defined and codified content, and with technical expertise seen as the essential precursor of artistic interpretation and individual expression. This perspective could be seen to shape both Brian Maloney’s class for the Royal Ballet, a functional technical and physical preparation for the company’s working day, and Anna du Boisson’s class, geared at the physical and emotional support of freelance professionals. It would perhaps explain the apparent presumption of teachers that the work of developing creativity happens elsewhere, through specially focused workshops, rehearsals and performances; and that it is not a primary responsibility of the “technique” class.

In contrast, for Eric Assandri, preparing young dancers for work in contemporary and independent dance, the development of the dancer’s own unique response to dance had a higher priority from the very start of learning, rather than gradually being left to emerge later in the process. While accepting the need to instil in novice students a disciplined attitude to their work in the ballet class, he could also be seen to incline towards a “logic of singularity”, whereby artistic dispositions might be nurtured. This was discernible in the classes of Anya Grinsted and Roger Tully, in independent studio practice away from immediate institutional or commercial employment imperatives. Here a slower pace of teaching encouraged more reflective learning and provided opportunities for the development of the dancer’s own individuality. Time was spent not only on remedial technical analysis, but also on the detail of personal interpretation and experience of the dance; providing space for Ben Spatz’ notion of practice as

research and discovery. Getting below the surface of *enchaînements* comprised of familiar elements but in less familiar combination, necessitated delving deeper into the detail of each technical challenge through individual response.

This brought to light possibilities for refinement and changing interpretation and expression in the way that Schön identified in the musical masterclasses he observed (Schön 1987). These processes foster the habits of detailed attention that Duerden remarked (Duerden 2007 p81) as characteristic of choreographers. Here is an opportunity for the ballet class to foment the development of artistic dispositions in dancers, by encouraging them to approach the work of deciphering and interpreting the balletic material of a classroom *enchaînement* as would a creative artist; through paying close attention to the functioning, meaning and expressive detail of the dance, both in its own right, and in conversation with music.

Bourdieu's depiction of the powerful unconscious self-perpetuation of the habitus can be read as the force which has driven the apparent unquestioning acceptance of dancers of the authority and sometimes authoritarian practices of teachers in the ballet class. But its mechanism of inculcated automaticity could be harnessed more productively by teachers, to instil over the lengthy gestation of the emerging dancer the values and professional habitus of a reflective artist. These would include:

- close attention to detail, not just of visible appearance, but as conveyed by other sensory information through somatic practice
- cultivation of strategies for deliberate practice and the autonomous development of personal expertise
- critical awareness of the availability of a variety of ways of performing balletic material; and the ability to make personal choices in line with technical and expressive intentions
- sensitivity to the different ways in which dance might be in collaborative

dialogue with the music

- A broader understanding of technique, as encompassing not simply physical skills but cognitive and artistic strategies for their imaginative use.

Thus artistry would no longer be superimposed on mechanical ability but would direct and give purpose to technical development from the beginning of the dancer's learning. A class which promotes and is guided by such values, making artistry and a reflective approach essential characteristics of technical study, would surely meet McFee's definition as an education rather than merely a physical training.

10.3 Class for repertoire and contextual study

Not only the teacher's approach, but importantly their choice of dance material to be studied in the class, has powerful implications for the development of balletic creativity. In an incorporating practice where repetition is necessary to engrain the knowledge transmitted in the body, and where there is little reference to inscribed sources, what is not included in the ballet class is likely to be lost. I conclude that consciously renewing the connection between the class and diverse aspects of ballet's repertoire would not only enrich the vocabulary of balletic actions available to today's young dancers, but also bring an awareness of stylistic diversity and scope for modification of the *danse d'école* in order to meet expressive and artistic ends.

As seen in the examples of historic classes discussed in Chapter 7, the 19th century class seems to have provided a place for study and practice of material destined for performance; but a gulf has arisen more recently between dancing in the studio and on stage, with ballet training methods currently prioritising the development of the athletic body, and the standardised execution of technical elements according to prevailing rationalised systems, such as the Vaganova school. In a dance culture of ever more

diverse project working and fewer full time contracts with stable companies, many dancers must cultivate a versatility of practice to survive; combining different training regimes to service their development as all purpose performers of sleek athletic physicality. AduB, despite welcoming stylistic variance in her eclectic clientele, and constructing a working environment supportive of the individual, nevertheless geared her open class to meeting narrowly defined, currently accepted norms of advanced technique. The work of assimilating a choreographer's distinctive style is increasingly situated in the project rehearsal room, rather than the dance technique class. With greater focus on physical and mechanical skills training ballet classes can therefore become diminished in their educational value. Less attention is paid to the generation of expressive dancing through exploration of ballet's varied vocabulary of steps and movement concepts; running the risk of excluding creativity from the development of the ballet dancer's habitus.

As an oral and embodied tradition, ballet's choreographic and creative heritage is not just the property of the institutions which are able to perform historic repertoire; it lives on in those professional dancers who move into teaching, such as those observed and interviewed for this research. Their embodied experience is therefore potentially a rich resource for studying different conceptions of balletic material and their combination to meet wide ranging expressive purposes.

Learning ballet repertoire usually involves learning complete dances or even ballets for performance; as such an experience largely inaccessible except to advanced students and professionals in vocational environments. But recently creative workshop practice drawing from company repertoire for outreach activities with amateurs, children, non dancers or those with disabling conditions, suggests how fragments of choreographic material might be opened up to dance learners of all levels of knowledge and expertise. Jennifer Jackson has developed a practice of deconstructing and remaking solos from

classic repertoire; both in choreographic workshops with students at the Royal Ballet School, and in a recent reworking of Petipa's *pas d'action* from the Prologue of *The Sleeping Beauty* for performance by vocational students in Images Ballet Company, and for playful exploration by dance students at Edge Hill University.

These are examples of how dancers might be provided with opportunities and strategies to familiarise themselves and play with iconic material to make new dances; much as bards in epic traditions might adapt and tell old tales in freshly relevant ways. Initiatives to do this might productively start in the ballet class, by renewing its link with repertoire. My own experience of incorporating such material into classes (Chapter 8.5) both gave me new insights into technical problems, and resulted in the generation of more varied and inventive *enchaînements*. The artistic dimension of learning, even if never to be realised in performance beyond the sheltered community of the studio, enriches and is enriched by its association with performances seen, which have often awoken the desire for practical experience. Use of this strategy has convinced me of its value in aiding learners to understand the expressive potential of balletic actions, providing an imaginative context for developing understanding of technical concepts, and their relation to artistic outcomes. For more experienced dancers, reconstructing fragments of choreography for technical study not only gives fresh insights into stylistic variation, and the historic hinterland of what they are learning, but would also by example encourage them to play with and take apart material from ballet's repertoire; to understand how it works and reconstruct its elements in fresh and personal combinations. The class therefore becomes part of the process of developing creativity that Weisberg describes (see Chapter 3.8) in his model of "expertise and structured imagination" or "reiterative thinking inside the box".

Thus teachers with personal performing histories and direct experience of great teachers of the past could beneficially draw more consciously on their own practice and

learning as a valuable resource of transferable knowledge, ensuring that they feed their own unique experience into ballet's on-going process of oral and embodied transmission. Through reiterated practice AG keeps alive the insightful pedagogy of Audrey De Vos, so admired by ballerinas Beryl Grey and Doreen Wells, and which fed into the highly influential teaching of Maggie Black. EP's class was an example of one that, over and above requiring the demonstration of technical prowess, evoked a historic style and particular dancing persona informed by his own performing experience, for students to try for size; suggesting an expressive dimension beyond the mastery of bodily skills. While this could be seen as part of an unquestioning acceptance of a 19th century model as the essential baseline of ballet's technical accomplishment, in its effective multidimensional transmission it prompted speculation as to the potential to model classes or *enchaînements* on other repertoire, both historic and current. Drawing students' attention to the presence of details of ballet's heritage in classroom material, however fragmentary, would generate a wider cultural awareness of the broader stream of ballet's knowledge, as well as its possibilities for creative reinvention in fresh interpretation and new choreography. It could revitalize ballet's tradition of situated learning through apprenticeship by reinforcing the connection between generations, coming together in the transmission and sharing of the specific personal experience of artist teachers. The imposition of systematized curricula can remove the idiosyncrasy of individual experience from class content and style in pursuit of a dubious and unattainable technical neutrality. By celebrating instead the rich diversity of its teachers and classes, the ballet community would encourage students both to broaden the scope of their learning, and make discriminating choices as to its application in performance and choreographic creation.

The increasing presence of video clips of dance performance on the internet via YouTube and Instagram now makes ballet's repertoire more widely accessible to those interested. But this remains a patchy and often unreliable resource; and unmediated

and decontextualised performance footage should be approached with the same scepticism and caution as the clips of extreme physical and technical feats which have been seen to have such damaging consequences (Chapter 7.7). Bourdieu alerts us to the logic of practice's irreversible temporal sequencing and on-going process of development (Chapter 3.5); this is unreflected in the clip of a final performance product which gives no hint as to how it was arrived at.

Embodied understanding of dancing action is not simply acquired by watching. Learning ballet from video without reference to its artistic and expressive intentions, historic and cultural contexts, away from ballet's material reality of repeated communal practice and shared experiential knowledge, potentially reduces the learning to copying of its externally visible physical mechanics; the rote learning where wider understanding is absent and cannot be transferred or personally constructed. By contrast, attending a class can draw the connection between the dancer's immediate personal experience of dancing particular material, and its context, origins and evolution over time, through the filter of the teacher's embodied transmission. Openly exploring material in this multi-dimensional way helps to develop capacities for detailed observation and critique, enabling both teachers and dancers to make constructive use of the ever increasing, rich, but indiscriminate resource of dance material available online.

10.5 Artists or athletes?

Increasing concerns about the physical fitness of dancers in the wake of the influential *Fit to Dance?* report, and a wider public culture of body consciousness, have lead to a proliferation of research into dancers' training from the perspective of sports science. Using models borrowed from the physical and psychological training of elite athletes, researchers have critiqued traditional teaching through the medium of the ballet class

for its perceived lack of theoretical biomechanical knowledge. The taller thinner dancers promoted by Balanchine, the gymnastic flexibility of dancers such as Sylvie Guillem and Edward Watson, and the hypermobile choreography of Wayne McGregor have contributed to the normalisation of an extreme body aesthetic which is now widely disseminated online via social media and sensational video clips. Major companies have embraced the cultivation of the dancer as athlete, investing in facilities for alternative body-work such as weight training, Pilates and Gyrotonics. Under pressure, ballet teachers are adapting their classes to cater to these demands, and to counter academic criticism of their experiential and embodied practice.

It is highly questionable whether an emphasis on generic athletic fitness in class is appropriate and sufficient to the refined and subtle technical needs of advanced dancers. A one-sided scientific perspective forgets the holistic nature of dancing; which is not solely aimed at measurable and defined athletic goals but engages all dimensions of the person, emotional, rational and physical, in the creation of a unique manifestation. As well as a compendium of highly specific bodily skills, ballet as a way of dancing has imaginative and artistic purposes, and is a communicative symbolic form. It has accumulated a sophisticated and evolving technical knowledge, and a rich heritage of art works. It requires not simply the practical know-how of *techné* but the capacity to discriminate and make judgements, to adapt old knowledge to new situations, and to communicate through performing and making new dances. To maintain this, the class as ballet's primary learning environment needs to provide the dancers, audiences, teachers and choreographers of the future with a wider artistic education, not merely a training. As ballet is an embodied form, this education most naturally takes place through interpersonal transmission from one generation to the next; as Molander argues (Chapter 3.6), learning through practical engagement not the application of theory.

Thus in contestation of my third question, in order to cultivate artistic capabilities in those they teach, I contend that ballet teachers, as Bruhn and Moore suggest, need to regard themselves as artists. Operating within ballet's wider professional community of practice, and passing on their knowledge to future dance artists, teachers should be encouraged to continue dancing, keeping their own artistic practice and perspective alive, so that their unique personal knowledge does not die with them. Where they themselves have an embodied experience of ballet's repertoire, overt use can be made of this as a teaching resource; not only to bring rich variety to their classes, but to increase students' knowledge of ballet's wide range of steps and styles. A class which focuses primarily on developing externally imposed conceptions of physical fitness risks not transmitting knowledge or understanding of the dance material which that fitness should be there to serve.

Paskevskaja holds that it is not for teachers to model choreographic behaviours (Chapter 3.3): the emphasis in classes should be on training accomplished performers rather than making dances. Yet when teachers set classroom *enchaînements* they are devising dances of didactic intention, exercising creativity in finding ways to meet the educational needs of the learners in front of them. It could be said that ballet teachers are constantly exercising Danielsson's "creativity in invention" in the choreography of microscopic dances for study, performance and sharing in the studio; as well as "creativity in use", through their on-going professional artistry in finding ways to engage learners and enable them to emerge and develop as confident dancers of balletic material. Pat Clapton reaches out to meet and nurture the dancing aspirations of local learners away from the centre of ballet's professional world. But she also encourages her young students in class to contribute and collaborate in the making of dances for performance, contributing at the start to the ballet community's overall development of a creative praxis. Through this activity teachers potentially model for those they teach not only the generation of new dances, but also the behaviours of attention to detail,

purposive action, improvisatory experiment and collaborative conversation with music that are necessary skills and attributes for the future interpreters and makers of dances as art.

10.6 Finding time

Adult beginners learn the hard way of the long duration of ballet's learning, often overwhelmed and discouraged in the early stages of their engagement with it. With ballet's long-term absorption further slowed by infrequent or erratic attendance, the pitching of the tasks of Ericsson's deliberate practice requires special skill and creativity from teachers; in keeping a constructive balance between comforting familiarity and unfamiliar challenge to encourage learners to commit for the long term. But for many British students the shoehorning of intensive vocational dance studies into conventional 3-year degree programmes precludes the unhurried absorption necessary for automatization of ballet's embodied skills. The emerging dance artist needs extensive familiarity with, and craft mastery of, the medium of their dancing, to be able to extend it imaginatively into Schön's "new forms of understanding and action where familiar categories and ways of thinking fail" (Schön 1987 p40).

The most important challenge for the development of ballet dancers as creative dance artists is therefore how to find more time; not only at the level of years spent in training, but at the micro level in the ballet class, time for fuller embodiment and conscious experience of dancing. Outside major training establishments and companies studio time is a rare and precious commodity, where teachers must fit as much activity as possible into large communal classes. Continuous aerobic classes which repeat familiar material can allow more time for dancing while building an athletic physical fitness. But if the ballet class does not provide time for consideration of the artistic dimensions and potential of the *danse d'école*, and the nurturing of creative behaviours,

ballet's principal learning environment will be reduced to providing a body training to service other forms of movement performance; rather than an education for dancers and the makers of dances.

This research has proposed a range of learning and teaching strategies for cultivating in dancers artistic behaviours and approaches to their study in the ballet class:

- slower combinations of material to allow somatic attention to detail
- the study of fragments of repertoire
- building contextual connections and musical awareness
- reflective and deliberate practice
- exercising judgement and making personal choices in interpretation of dancing tasks.

It may seem impossible to find time to accommodate all these within one ballet class, without losing sight of its overall shape and balanced range of vocabulary. But as has been shown, the nature of ballet's learning is one of constant reiteration. Through repeated classes even fleeting moments and fragmentary glimpses may add up imperceptibly to substantial learning over time. Just as the beginner to their surprise and delight suddenly realises that they can after all execute that pirouette they originally found so difficult, so may more advanced dancers find that through their daily engagement in the ballet class over time a different perception and sensibility may emerge, that of the creative dance artist.

Appendix 1: List of research data generated

Roger Tully class observation Wednesday 21st December 2016
Interview questions

Field notes of class participation
Roger Tully interview at his home in Lindfield, Friday 1st September 2017, transcript

Elmhurst Ballet School class observation Tuesday 28th February 2017

Interview questions
Field notes from observation
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript
Errol Pickford interview, transcript

London Studio Centre observation Tuesday 28th March 2017

Interview questions
Observation transcript from video clips
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript
Laura Hussey interview, transcript

Royal Academy of Dance observation Tuesday 21st March 2017

Interview questions
Observation transcript from video clips
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript
Guy Burden interview transcript

Windrush School of Ballet observation Tuesday 27th June 2017

Interview questions
Field notes from observation, hand filled proforma
Field notes reflections hand written after
Student interview transcript
Pat Clapton interview transcript

Anna du Boisson Dance works class observation Friday 3rd November 2017

Interview questions
Field notes from observation
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript
Anna du Boisson interview transcript

Northern School of Contemporary Dance observation Friday 10th November 2017

Interview questions
Field notes from observation
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript
Eric Assandri interview transcript

Susie Crow Adult Beginners' class Autumn Term 2017

Interview questions
Class content with reflective commentary and music information
Student group interview transcript

Anya Grinsted Chilworth class Tuesday 2nd January 2018

Interview questions
Field notes from observation
Field notes and reflections written after
Student group interview transcript

Appendix 2. Ethical Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DAN 16/ 026 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 08/09/16. Consent was sought from participating teachers, students, class accompanists and institutions; a sample letter is given below.



INSTITUTIONAL CONSENT FORM FOR ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE

Title of Research Project: The Ballet Class: Educating the Creative Dance Artist?

Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:

This PhD research project looks at the traditional ballet technique class, to consider its contribution to the development of ballet dancers as imaginative interpreters and potential choreographers. It is therefore necessary to consider what the ballet class consists of; the knowledge content, means of transmission and learning, and how the class is shaped by the aims and understandings of teachers and learners. In addition to reading research, investigating ballet as a non-verbal activity learned through practical engagement calls for field research into current practice. This will be conducted through observation and documentation by the researcher of a range of classes for learners aged 18 years and over, and in some cases interviews with teachers and learners.

You are asked to give your consent for:

- students of the BA (Hons) Ballet Education course offered by the Faculty of Education of the Royal Academy of Dance to be observed in one of their regular ballet classes as part of their course, the class being recorded on video for analysis.
- if possible, selected students to participate in a brief group interview and discussion after the class (15-30 minutes), this to be recorded on video or audio for later transcription and analysis.
- The class teacher to be observed by the researcher teaching the ballet class.
- The class teacher to be interviewed one-to-one (30 minutes-1 hour) by the researcher as soon as possible after teaching the observed class, the interview to be recorded for later transcription and analysis.
- Use of screen grabs and brief clips from video documentation to be used in presentations about the research.

Should any participant prefer not to take part, or decide during the process that they wish to withdraw, they may do so freely at any point. The identity of all those participating will be concealed and protected. Any contribution students may make in class or interview will be kept anonymous, and their identity obscured in any screen

grabs or video clips. Any contribution teachers may make in class or interview will be kept anonymous unless they expressly consent to being named. Likewise the identity of your institution will be kept confidential unless you would prefer it to be named. Being able to name institutions and teachers would help to situate classes, their content and teaching, within historical and cultural perspectives as part of an on-going yet evolving artistic tradition, and give appropriate credit to contributing individuals and organisations.

It is hoped that the research will not only contribute new theoretical insight into the ballet class, but will also prove of practical benefit to teachers and students wishing to enhance their understanding of ballet as a way of dancing and a means of artistic expression. Research findings may be disseminated through publication in specialist press, academic journals, conference presentations, and in contribution to a book.

Investigator Contact Details:

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Consent Statement:

I agree to permit students and teachers of the Faculty of Education of the Royal Academy of Dance to take part in this research in the capacity outlined above. I understand that they are free to withdraw at any point, without giving a reason, by contacting the investigator using the contact details given above. I understand that the information provided will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that the identity of students will be concealed and protected in the publication of any findings; likewise the identity of teachers unless they give their consent to being identified, and this institution unless I give specific clearance for it to be named. Data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with University of Roehampton Data Protection Policy. I give permission for the investigator to retain my personal details and the outcome of any observation or interviews locked in a secure environment for the exclusive use of this project, not to be divulged to a third party.

Name On behalf of:

Signature

Date

I give my permission for the Institution's name to be used in dissemination of findings.

Name

Signature

Date

I give my permission for the use of screen grabs and brief clips from video documentation to be used in presentations about the research.

Name

Signature

Date

Please print and return the signed consent form to the researcher.

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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Appendix 3. Interview questions

A comprehensive list of questions was adapted for teachers, students, and adult dancers, providing a basis for all the interviews undertaken, to enable some points of comparison. The list provided a guideline, and in the event interviews were often more informal in structure, some questions modified or left out to be relevant to specific interviewees, and other necessary questions as to context included. See below for list of questions for teachers as an example.

Questions for teachers:

1. What is the aim/purpose of this class? What do you aim to achieve in this class in general, and what was your focus in particular today?
2. What do you think the dancers want and need to get from attending this class?
3. How is the content of your class related to other aspects of these dancers' work/study? What do you think ballet classes contribute to their development as performers?
4. How much and what aspects of this class did you prepare in advance of teaching? *(if there is a written plan ask for a copy)*
5. Please tell me about a particular moment from this class today that struck you, either as problematic or positive; what you were aware of, what you thought, felt.
6. What do you consider to be the principle feature and issues of teaching dancers at this particular level of skill and development?
7. What do you remember of your own learning in class, of your dance teachers? Please tell me about an experience from a class you remember (as a student or young dancer).
8. In what ways do you teach similarly or differently from your teachers? Do you see your teaching as part of a particular ballet schooling or tradition, if so what, and in what ways?
9. How would you describe the ideal ballet dancer? How would you define ability in ballet? What in your view makes an expert ballet dancer?
10. How would you define ballet technique? What do you think it might encompass?

11. How important is the development of physical fitness as a purpose of this ballet class?
12. Do you perceive a current prevailing aesthetic in ballet, and if so how would you describe it? What do you think is currently fashionable in ballet and dance generally?
13. Do you think ballet dancers are artists and if so in what ways? To what extent and in what ways would you see yourself as an artist?
14. In what ways do you think your class might contribute to developing the dancer as an artist? What opportunities do you think there might be in the class for developing creativity or individual interpretation?
15. In what ways does music contribute to dance learning in your classes? What difference does having a live pianist make to the class/your teaching/students' learning?

Appendix 4: Ballet class observation profiles

The following profiles were compiled using contextual data, field notes and reflective writing on observations.

5.1 Roger Tully open class, Wednesday 21st December 2016

Context and documentation

I began my observations with one of Roger Tully's London Wednesday open classes, that I myself have attended on a regular basis for some years. Rather than observer my role in this class was that of an observing participant. I was unable to record the class as it was happening, so field notes were written that afternoon, accessing my immediate memory of the class and its happenings in a hand written stream of consciousness. Habitually immediately after this weekly Wednesday morning class as many as can go on to a local cafe for coffee and conversation, often including further discussion of particular matters arising in the class as well as wider issues in the dance world, before dispersing for individual work commitments. It was therefore not possible formally to interview class participants immediately following, although I did capture some of our conversation in field notes. Roger Tully (RT) was 88 years old when he taught this class, and so I interviewed him at a later date (1st September 2017) in the comfort of his own home.

The class is attended by a range of dancers including both vocational students and some young professionals but also a number of older dancers, many now working as teachers and choreographers, as well as non-professional dancers including a visual artist and a member of the English National Opera chorus, with occasional visits from former students of RT's from overseas. Numbers vary as class members work round their professional commitments, with anything between 5 and 12 dancers.

Teacher biography

RT began dancing with lessons in the Dalcroze method with Muriel Green. He studied ballet initially with Rambert who soon had him performing; he also experienced lessons with Idzikowski. His performing career included being a member of Mona Inglesby's International Ballet whose programme featured Sergeyev's productions of Russian classical repertoire; also dancing with Walter Gore's London Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, as well as in musicals at Drury Lane. Having become a regular pupil of former Pavlova dancer Kathleen Crofton, he eventually took over her classes, teaching in major London studios at West Street, Pineapple, Urdang Academy and DanceWorks. Ultimately he taught at his own studio in Bedford Gardens, with international guest commitments for major companies and conservatoires in New York, Paris and Helsinki where he has also coached world champion Latin dancers. Roger has recently moved out of London but his class continues every Wednesday, with Roger teaching once a fortnight, and intervening classes taught by longstanding pupils such as former American Ballet Theatre dancer Naomi Sorkin, Jennifer Jackson and myself. Studio rental and class payment is managed by one of the dancers.

The studio currently used, belonging to a ballroom dancing school, is centrally located in the basement of a church in Blandford Street; it is small (approximately 5 metres by

8) with a hard slippery floor and a limited number of portable barres, with some mirror panels between the windows, and an old full-length framed mirror at one end. With 12 dancers on this occasion most exercises in the centre had to be performed in two groups.

Class content

This one and a half hour class began with what RT calls “the preamble”; a series of three very short warm-up exercises. With the back to the barre the first was a simple sequence of *battements tendus* and transfer of weight with a sideways and circling *port de bras*; the second a combination of leg swinging *battements* across the body with rebounding *battements piqués*. Finally with the feet in 1st position a *port de bras* sequence *en dehors* and *en dedans* with different body bends. These were accompanied by Roger singing softly with monosyllabic instructions.

Pliés with *port de bras* were followed by a *battement tendu* with *rond de jambe*, which after analysis by RT we repeated, the second time slower to enable more detailed articulation of the action. We also repeated a sequence of *battements glissés* with *petits retirés*. A simple *rond de jambe* with different speeds was followed by a separate *port de bras* facing *croisé* to the barre and finishing in *arabesque*, paying attention to the use and direction of the body in movement, performed continuously on both sides. A *battement frappé* and *petit battement* exercise performed just *à la seconde* focused on careful preparation for each *frappé* as well as the placement of the thigh. An adage performed *croisé* to the barre executed mainly on the *demi-pointe* and involving a *rotation* to *écarté* and two very distinctive *arabesques* provoked further discussion and was repeated. A challenging *grand battement* exercise with changes of direction, *battements piqués* and *en cloche* required detailed analysis of the action of the body and was also repeated.

In the centre a *port de bras* simply swept the body forward in a lunge before stepping back to the *demi-pointe*. Having discussed how the arms follow the impulse of the body we did it again. A tiny *enchaînement* of *battements tendus* forward and back modelled the use of the arms for *brisés volés*. Time was spent refining the execution of a short sequence building to a *pirouette en dedans* through a complex preparation by *grand pas de basque* and *soutenu* turn. The adage included *développé passé* to *arabesque* and *promenade*, culminating in a *pirouette* in *attitude*; RT drew attention once again to initiation of action by the body and to the linkage of movement. Detailed attention was paid to the gestural *port de bras* and leg action in the sequence of *chassé pas de bourrées* which follows. A short allegro *enchaînement* began with *temps de cuisses* and included *glissade jeté* and an *assemblé* under. We finished as is customary with a flowing *port de bras* and a *révérence* before all thanking Roger individually, a chance for some personal feedback.

Although Roger's classes were formerly often accompanied live by a pianist or by Roger whistling, the current classes make use of recorded music. On this occasion the music used was a playlist by American pianist Marjorie de Landsmark Lewis, playing mainly 19th century melodies including several by Tchaikovsky as well as pieces by Fauré and Dvorak.

5.2 Elmhurst Ballet School Post Graduate male class 28th February 2017

Context and documentation

Having requested to observe Elmhurst vocational ballet students in their final year, I was allowed to observe the Post Graduate Male class taught by former Royal Ballet principal Errol Pickford. This intensive year is specifically designed to prepare dancers for auditions and a professional career; aimed at either final year students, professional dancers seeking recuperation from injury, or dancers from overseas looking for audition opportunities. The diverse group of twelve young men included two visiting students from the Beijing Academy, on a one-year exchange placement programme. The students have one classical ballet technique class five days a week, but in addition almost daily *pas de deux* classes, and solos classes three days a week; that afternoon students rehearsed repertoire for a school performance in the school's theatre. In addition to practical classes and contextual study, course participants are helped with preparing CVs and portfolios, and have extensive opportunities to perform, both in student performances but for some also with Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB), prior to attending auditions. The job-seeking process continues through the whole year; the one and a half hour class I attended was a prepared appraisal class to be attended by visiting company directors the following week; and students had recently attended company auditions in Australia and Croatia. BRB Director David Bintley was in the building preparing to make a work for the students' summer performance that day, and dropped into the class to watch part of it with a view to selecting dancers.

I was able to conduct a brief group interview with the students immediately after the observation. I had requested permission to video, but this was not granted so I had to rely on written field notes for documentation, which was challenging, the extensiveness and complexity of the material accentuated by the speed of delivery. Later I interviewed the class teacher for the year group with whom I also had extensive informal conversation over lunch.

Teacher biography

Australian by birth, Errol Pickford (EP) initially trained as a gymnast, before moving to England, where he studied at the Hammond School and Royal Ballet Upper School, gaining his Royal Academy of Dancing Solo Seal, and winning the RAD's Adeline Genée Competition. He became a Principal dancer with the Royal Ballet, creating roles in ballets by Kenneth MacMillan, Frederick Ashton and David Bintley. In 1997 he returned to Perth as a principal dancer with the Western Australian Ballet. On retiring from performing he took up teaching, passing the RAD's Professional Dancers' Teaching Diploma with Distinction. His extensive experience since then has included teaching for other major UK vocational schools, and established professional companies including BRB, The Australian Ballet, Rambert Dance, Adventures in Motion Pictures, English National Ballet and K Ballet in Japan, where he was for four years Ballet Master and School Director. He joined the Elmhurst faculty in 2008.

Class content

The class took place in a generously sized studio with a curved wall of windows facing out onto garden, with an upright piano and sound system; there were two completely mirrored walls, and barres all round on three walls apart from the window area. This seemed to offer a natural front to the studio space, but in fact the centre work of the class was performed facing the mirrored wall opposite.

The dance material of this one and a half hour class was largely already known to the students; it included minimal unseen content, and thus required little time spent in explanation. The barre included a set *plié* exercise but with personal choice of stretches and *port de bras*, three pre-set *battement tendu* exercises starting with

tendus in first and getting faster, followed by two *battement glissé* exercises, one involving a heel and toe action. *Rond de jambe* included singles, doubles and *rond de jambe jeté* with a final *port de bras* and balance; *battement fondu* included a *fouetté pirouette*. A fast *battement frappé* exercise on the flat and *demi-pointe* also incorporated *petits battements*; while the adage included sustained *développés* and was combined with *grands battements*. Fast and functional, the barre concluded with rises and *relevés* on two legs and on one facing the barre. Apart from a couple of general corrections to the whole group, any corrections were given to individuals during execution as Errol walked round, as exercises were performed on both sides without break.

The centre work comprised elaborately choreographed *enchaînements* often lasting 32 counts, showing off the technical competence of the students and their mastery of a wide range of vocabulary. A *port de bras* including a series of heroic poses set the tone for challenging material to be delivered with *danseur noble* dignity. This was followed by a combination of *battements tendus* changing direction and varied *pirouettes*, including one finishing in *arabesque*, executed with double or triple turns; then a long adage with *développés*, *promenades* and a “princely” *arabesque penché*. A combination of *pirouettes* on a waltz incorporated turns in *attitude* and *à la seconde* among others ending in open positions. These centre practice *enchaînements* included occasional allegro linking steps such as *balancé* and *temps levé* as part of the sequence, including in the adage a *jeté entrelacé*, and with the *pirouettes* a *renversé sauté*; choreographed entrances and exits which permitted a smooth continuous transition between groups also adding to the impression that the *enchaînements* were choreographed as though short classical variations for performance.

Allegro work built up from a travelling warm up diagonally crossing the space in groups with simple *temps levés*, galops and *changements*. This was followed directly by a *petit allegro* step executed in lines gradually travelling downstage, incorporating *assemblés* and *sissonnes*; and two *batterie* sequences, the first combining *échappés*, *entrechat quatre* and *sissonne doublée*, the second with *jetés battus*, *cabrioles* and *fouetté sauté*. Higher elevation and turning jumps came with a waltz of big *sissonnes fermées* finishing with a double *assemblé* to the knee, and a final *grand allegro* with *grand jeté en tournant* and double *tour en l'air*. The class concluded with exhibition of individual virtuosity; *grands pirouettes* of the students' choice to their preferred side, performed in small groups, followed by an opportunity for each dancer to do a *manège* sequence of their choice on their own, choosing to finish with turns or exit with a *grand jeté*.

Pianist Trevor Walker is a highly experienced ballet class accompanist. His stirring selection of familiar melodies not only included classical music from ballets in BRB repertoire such as *Solitaire*, *Flowers of the Forest*, *Giselle* and *Swan Lake* alongside Verdi arias, Chopin, Tchaikovsky and even some Wagner; but also popular songs such as ‘Love and Marriage’, ‘Matchmaker’, and even ‘Land of Hope and Glory’.

5.3 Royal Academy of Dance BA Hons Ballet Education class, 21st March 2017

Context and documentation

One of the UK's major dance teaching organisations, for nearly 100 years the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) has not only been responsible for the progressive devising

of a system of graded examinations in ballet for learners from infant beginners through to vocational students aspiring to professional careers, but also for the training of teachers certified to deliver this syllabus and curriculum all over the UK and in schools world-wide. Over the years the organisation has increasingly aligned itself with higher education structures and pathways, to be able to offer officially recognised qualifications with degree status, which are currently accredited by the University of Bath. The BA Hons Ballet Education is a three-year full-time course for aspiring teachers delivered by the Faculty of Education at the RAD's London headquarters in Battersea. On successful completion students have the option to gain RAD Registered Teacher Status entitling them to teach and enter students for the RAD's graded exams. Options offered for further study are a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education: Dance Teaching, leading to Qualified Teacher Status and enabling graduates to teach dance in secondary schools in the State system; or a Masters in Education (Dance Teaching) designed for practising teachers and undertaken over two to three years of part-time distance learning.

I was particularly interested to see how the teaching of ballet as an embodied practice might sit within an institution and a modular course structured to meet academic assessment requirements. Having submitted a proposal to observe in accordance with the RAD's Research Ethics Committee's guidelines, I was welcomed to watch a ballet class for 28 female students in their second year, and allowed to video it, as well as undertaking a 25 minute group interview with six students, followed by a longer one-to-one interview with their teacher.

Teacher biography

Guy Burden (GB) trained at the Royal Ballet School and at Elmhurst Ballet School, during which time he had opportunities to perform and tour with Birmingham Royal Ballet. He danced as a soloist with the Vanemuine Teater Ballet in Estonia and with English National Ballet before completing a PGCE specialising in dance for secondary education in 2012, which led to teaching experience in both public and private dance schools. He joined the RAD's Faculty of Education in 2015; as well as lecturing on dance education for undergraduates and postgraduates, he tutors PGCE dance trainees for Qualified Teacher Status, and has managed first year students as level co-ordinator. He is responsible for practical teaching and learning of ballet at level 5 as well as leading the module for the practical study of repertoire for level 4.

Class content

The class took place in one of the large studios in the RAD annexe building with barres on all sides and one mirrored wall. For this class two lengths of portable barre were erected in the centre at right angles to the mirror which enabled students working at these barres to watch themselves on one side for the barre exercises. Centre work was undertaken using the mirrored wall as the front.

The two hour class was one of the Module BBE501 Technique and Performance; a 30 credit module with a student workload of 300 hours and contact time of 240 hours. In the event only a short part of this session was given over to ballet technique class; a 22 minute warm-up included a truncated barre and a couple of little warm-up jumps to prepare students for practical work on one of this module's repertoire studies. GB had offered students a choice for assessment performance of two 20th century ballet solos in contrasting styles, the Summer Fairy variation from Ashton's *Cinderella*, and the Bransle Gay solo from Balanchine's *Agon*. The greater part of this session was spent going over the latter in detail, to ascertain how to meet the specified assessment criteria. Students worked in four groups, with GB encouraging them to discuss and share their knowledge to identify key moments and challenges, before sharing these in

turn with the entire class and running through the solo in groups incorporating what they had learned in execution.

The barre of pre-set exercises began with a *plié* exercise set to Chopin with *port de bras* in 1st, 2nd and 5th, executed only on one side to save time. This was followed by quick rises in 1st and on one leg facing the barre followed by lunges to stretch out the calf muscles. A *battement tendu* sequence executed on both sides incorporated a lunge on *demi-pointe* and circling of the foot, and finished with a *relevé* and balance with the foot *cou-de-pied*. This was followed by further quick rises facing the barre alternating parallel and turned-out legs, with another opportunity to stretch out the calves. An exercise incorporating *ronds de jambe à terre* and *en l'air* was performed continuously on both sides, and followed by a *port de bras* sequence performed on both sides and ending in a balance in *arabesque*. Once more students faced the barre to do a series of relaxed leg swings to the side and across the body, and then with one hand on the barre leg swings forward and back on both sides, the whole sequence repeated. Set to a tango a *battement fondu* exercise incorporated rises with the foot placed *cou-de-pied*, and ended with a single *pirouette en dehors* away from the barre and a *pas de bourrée piqué* to the other side. There was a brief hiatus after this for comments from GB and an opportunity for students to practise the *pirouette*.

The final exercise at the barre was a sequence of *grands battements* to a Spanish jota, with *battements en cloche* and on a *fondu* turning the thrown leg in and out. This occasioned further correction to the group as to hip placement on *grands battements* to the side, and students were encouraged to try these with both hands on the hips. Students then came into the centre to do an *enchaînement* of jumps on two legs including *changements* and *échappés* finishing with a step up to the *demi-pointe*, followed by hops in parallel with a sustained *relevé* on alternating legs. The class section ended with a *reverence* followed by applause and thanks to the pianist, the very experienced Martin Cleave, who had played a sympathetic classical selection including folk and social dance forms such as a hornpipe, polkas and a jig. The rest of the session made use of recorded music for rehearsal of the Stravinsky *Agon* solo.

5.4 London Studio Centre Musical Theatre final year class 28th March 2017

Context and documentation

London Studio Centre (LSC) is a major vocational school based at Arts Depot in north London, preparing dancers for a professional performing career through a three year BA (Hons) Theatre Dance course validated by Middlesex University. As the course progresses students opt for a specialisation according to their interest and aptitudes: either classical ballet, contemporary dance, jazz theatre dance or music theatre. Over the final year students are thus grouped in four student companies to work with professional choreographers on making a programme of pieces for a series of public performances on tour and in London; thus undergoing what could be described as an apprenticeship in a professional dance context.

In the Musical Theatre Professional Option group, students work to develop a full range of singing, dancing and acting skills with a view to gaining employment in musical theatre productions nationally and internationally. Having completed the first semester of their final year with its formative and summative assessments in ballet, they were now beginning to prepare for their performance programme; but technique classes continued. Ballet is a foundation technique for all LSC students no matter their

specialisation. For the first two years students will have done five one and a half hour ballet classes per week; for the musical theatre group this reduces to three per week in the final year. The class I observed was two hours long, accommodating 38 female dancers (this year's intake included no male dancers, but there were to be 9 male dancers in the next year group, and there had been 5 the year before). I was given permission to document this class on video; and followed it with a group interview with 6 students, and a longer one-to-one interview with their teacher, Laura Hussey (LH). LH is typical of LSC teaching staff who are often continuing with professional performing activity as they transition to more full-time teaching, thus providing the school with a direct and current link to professional practice.

Teacher biography

Class teacher Laura Hussey (LH) trained at the Royal Ballet Senior School for three years before joining Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (now Birmingham Royal Ballet) in 1984. She danced with London City Ballet from 1990 to 1998 becoming a Principal Dancer, and shortly after this took her first job in musical theatre, performing in *The Pajama Game*. In 2001 she joined English National Ballet (ENB) where she stayed for 10 years becoming a First Artist, and beginning to teach classes, coach repertoire, and work with students of ENB School, as well as running *Angelina Ballerina* tours for three years. She is now a freelance ballet teacher, teaching part time for LSC and maintaining her link with ENB as a Guest Character Artist and teacher on the Adult Ballet Programme.

Class content

The class took place in a light high ceilinged studio with mirrors on opposite walls and frosted glass windows. There were barres on all the walls, but this large group also needed two portable barres in the centre of the studio. Centre work faced the mirror, with the pianist at an upright piano to one side. LH plans her classes in advance, and sticks to the same material for a week to give students the opportunity to repeat and master it; it was apparent that some exercises needed minimal instruction. A fast-paced 55 minute barre began with four warm-up exercises facing the barre; starting in parallel with circling ankles and calf stretches, followed by a sequence of treading through the legs and pulling away from the barre to curve and stretch out the back. A third sequence, turning away from the barre with feet in a parallel 4th position for a forward bend, ended with the legs rotating out; and the final sequence was a *battement tendu* exercise in turn-out with a side *port de bras*. *Pliés* in all positions were followed by three *battement tendu* exercises, first with transfer of weight through *demi plié*, then with *retirés*, and finally incorporating a rise, set to a fast march. Two *battement jeté* exercises included an *enveloppé* action and *battements piqués*. *Ronds de jambe* included lifting the leg and a *port de bras* with a side stretch pulling off balance away from the barre; *battements fondus* were executed with high legs and finished with a *developpé passé* and swish through the 1st position. A fiendishly fast *battement frappé* sequence incorporated double *battement frappé* into a low *rond de jambe* and ended with a balance on *demi-pointe*. A balletic stretching sequence incorporated shouldering the leg and an *arabesque penchée*, and was followed by an *adage* combining *developpés* and *grands port de bras*, and *grands battements*.

A five minute break allowed for varied personal stretches, mainly on the floor, chatting and drinking water, while LH walked round to talk with individual students and the pianist collected a coffee. The class resumed for centre work beginning with a combined *port de bras* and *adage*, performed in two groups and repeated after general feedback and critique from LH. For most of the centre work the class divided into two groups to allow sufficient space. There followed a sequence of *enchaînements* built round development of *pirouettes* of increasing difficulty; from 5th and 4th positions, *en*

dehors and *en dedans*, singles then doubles, combined with *battements tendus*, *glissés* and *grands battements*. This section of the class finished with an opportunity for all students to execute a sequence of 16 *fouetté* turns to their preferred side, and a sequence of *posé* and *chaîné* turns diagonally from the corner to the right and left performed in pairs. Allegro work focused on *petit allegro enchaînements*, building in complexity from 16 simple *changements* through two combinations incorporating *échappés*, *changements* and *assemblés*. A sequence of *chassé coupé chassé* finishing with *assemblé* travelling diagonally across the studio was performed on both sides in pairs, and repeated with the incorporation of a turn in the *chassé* section; LH encouraged the students to sing along with 'These are a few of my favourite things' which accompanied it. A more complex 16 count combination including *glissades*, *jetés*, *pas de bourrée*, *ballonnés* and a final *brisé* was carefully analysed and studied before being executed on both sides in two groups and repeated. The class finished with a short *reverence*.

The class was accompanied by pianist Justin Stevens (JS); although occasional classes or warm-ups may use recorded music, as a general rule all ballet classes at LSC have live piano accompaniment. JS provided an eclectic and energising range of music including not only classics by Chopin and Ravel, but also 19th century ballet music by Ponchielli and Delibes, ragtime by Scott Joplin, and musical theatre and film favourites such as the theme tune from *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

5.5 Windrush School of Ballet adult beginners' class 27th June 2017

Context and documentation

I was keen to sample the work of a small local ballet school away from larger conurbations, so observed an adult beginners' ballet class at the Windrush School of Ballet in the market town of Witney, west of Oxford in an almost rural setting on the edge of the Cotswolds. The school offers ballet classes taught by experienced local RAD Registered Teacher Patricia (Pat) Clapton (PC) and provides options for children to enter for RAD examinations and presentations. In addition the school offers some musical theatre classes, and two adult ballet classes, one for beginners and one at an intermediate level aimed at those already with some experience of dance or ballet. The school is run with the help of an administrator who deals with the simple website and online communications; and additional part time input from other locally based teachers. It has a mixed clientele of students, a few children at private schools in Oxfordshire but others at local state schools.

The one hour evening adult beginner class I observed took place in a community hall in a housing estate; in the main hall ballet class for a group of teenage students was in progress with another teacher, but PC herself took charge of the only adult learner who turned up (usually the class has around three or four students) and taught in a smaller side room with a lino floor. The main hall had wall barres, the side room a portable barre; neither spaces had mirrors. The learner was a young woman in her twenties from Latvia now working in Witney. At the end of the evening, having interviewed both PC and her student, I gave PC and her grand-daughter a lift home to the village of Bladon. PC does not drive and is therefore dependent on a shrinking rural bus service and lifts from her close-knit family to reach the two halls where she teaches. Although in her seventies she cannot afford to retire, teaching classes on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons and evenings, and Saturday mornings till 2.00pm.

Teacher biography

PC's father died in the 2nd World War when PC was 16 months old, leaving her mother to cope as a single parent working in domestic service. PC discovered ballet at the age of about 10 years old when by chance she saw *Coppelia* on television at her aunt's house; she knew then and there that ballet was what she wanted to do, but her mother could not afford to send her to Oxford for ballet classes. PC left school at the age of 15 without O Levels, began working, and with her earnings paid for as many ballet classes as she could afford with Oxford based teacher (and later RAD major examiner) June Christian; also continuing her general education through night school classes. She did not have a performing career but went straight into teaching, continuing to develop her training largely via courses and workshops provided within the RAD system.

Class content

The one hour class began with half an hour of barre work including *pliés* both *demi*- and full with a rise in 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions; two *battement tendu* exercises, one to the side and the other *en croix*; *ronds de jambe en dehors* and *en dedans*; an exercise for *battement fondu en croix*; and *grands battements devant* combined with *relevés* in 5th position. Centre practice comprised a preliminary exercise of *demi-pliés* and rises and body bends forward and to the side in 1st and 2nd, but ending with a freer use of the arms with the feet in parallel; followed by a *port de bras* with some natural movement elements in parallel; a triplet waltz step with a spin and rise that was designed to travel round the room; jumps on two feet in first and parallel, followed by a series of *changements* and some *petits jetés derrières*; and finally a simple *balancé* combination including a *reverence*.

PC drew for music on her collection of class CDs, including West End and Broadway theme tunes from shows such as *Cats* and *Evita*, which she thought students might be more familiar with, as well as classical pieces including a Chopin mazurka, and excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. She uses a locally based live pianist for examinations and the preparatory classes leading up to them, and really appreciates the closer connection that this enables her students to have with the music and their resulting confidence.

5.6 Anna du Boisson daily open class at Danceworks 3rd November 2017

Context and documentation

Danceworks on Balderton Street just off Oxford Street opposite Selfridges is one of very few dance centres in the heart of London's West End; a complex of dance studios for rental offering a programme of classes taught by independent teachers in a range of dance genres, morning to evening seven days a week. Classes are pay-as-you-go, with dancers either paying an annual membership for right of entry, or as occasional visitors purchasing a day membership card. For professional dancers not in companies with the luxury of class provision, those on projects, in commercial shows or between jobs, such centres offer a vital facility where technique, strength and stamina can be maintained and burnished on a regular basis. Studios here are occasionally booked for rehearsals or auditions, so despite minimal space to relax and socialise the centre also acts as a place for networking for the itinerant and shifting professional population. Classes are clearly advertised as being at a range of levels from beginner to professional, thus accommodating amateur dancers as well and even

some children's classes; level descriptors are fluid, with some classes in the middle range attracting a varied mix of amateurs and professionals. I observed an open midday class taught by Anna du Boisson; although billed as Elementary this contained a wide range of participants, from enthusiastic and experienced amateurs of long standing through to vocational students and currently working dancers, choosing to study with this particular teacher and at this time of day.

I was interested to study how a class in this unstable context, untethered to either a structured training programme or specific performance outcome, with an ever-changing and unpredictable clientele, might require the teacher to adapt or bring a different approach or focus to the work. Under these circumstances I was requested not to ask individual class participants for their written consent; the teacher was concerned that being formally alerted to the presence of a researcher might put some dancers off from attending what they view as a space for personal working, with a consequently detrimental effect to her class income; and in a tight schedule with no turn-around time in the studio allowed between classes, the process of getting written permission (impossible to gather this in advance with the eventual make-up of the group unknown) would eat unacceptably into teaching and dancing time. In this situation it was not possible to video the class; once warmly and informally introduced to the group I sat in a corner taking field notes as discreetly as possible. AduB did arrange for three dancers currently attending her classes with regularity to be interviewed briefly after class before I interviewed her.

Teacher biography

Anna du Boisson (AduB) ARAD DIP DPTC is one of London's most established and well-known independent ballet teachers. Having trained at Elmhurst and Rambert Ballet School she danced internationally as a soloist, including working with companies in the former Yugoslavia and Switzerland. Her teaching career has spanned over 30 years and included training and coaching dancers from the Royal Ballet, English National Ballet and New York City Ballet, as well as dancers in West End musicals such as *Billy Elliot*. In 1986 she founded The West London School of Dance, which culminates in preparing young dancers for entry into the final years of training at major vocational schools; but despite this major commitment to the younger generation she maintains her Monday to Friday 1.00-2.30pm class at Danceworks open to all comers. I have myself occasionally attended her class.

Class content

The class took place in Studio 10 on the ground floor, 12.1 by 9.5 metres, with windows looking out onto the Danceworks reception area so that those coming in to the centre are able to stop and watch. Two walls are mirrored, and all four walls have barres attached. In a class of 28 participants (24 female and 4 male) it was necessary to have in addition 6 portable barres making three rows in the centre of the room for the barre work. The class lasted exactly one and a half hours. 40 minutes of barre work included a warm-up exercise with body bends facing the barre, obviously a repeated daily sequence for which the dancers needed no instruction. This was followed by *pliés*; three *battement tendu* exercises (from 1st position, 5th position, and then a faster combination with *petits retirés*); *battements glissés* with *piqués*; *ronds de jambe à terre* followed by a *port de bras* and balance; *battements fondus*; a balletic stretch of the dancers' choice (variants including stretches with the leg on the barre, shouldering the leg, splits and deep lunges); *battements frappés* on the flat foot repeated on the *demi-pointe* and finishing with an extended balance in *attitude*; an adage including an *arabesque penché*; and *grands battements* with a *chassé* away from the barre with one hand on the hip as a final flourish. Many of these exercises were performed continuously on both sides without a break.

A very short break allowed for the portable barres to be stored against back and side walls, for dancers to pay for the class with cash at the piano, and to pick up thin yoga mats for a brief continuous 10 minute sequence of floor-work exercises. These include a seated 'bum stretch' with crossed legs, sit-ups, forward bends over straight legs, lying back on elbows and lifting the pelvis, press-ups (a range of personal versions with bent or straight legs accepted), lying on the front to lift the upper back, side stretches sitting with legs apart, and to finish a stretch of the dancers' choice. The dancers all seemed familiar with this sequence.

Centre work was performed in groups, with some female dancers now working on pointe; starting with a simple *battement tendu* exercise. A *grand adage* finishing with a *port de bras* kneeling was repeated; a classic repeating phrase travelling from the corner with *pirouette en dehors* finishing in a lunge was executed in continuous smaller groups of two or three dancers with some dancers doing two, three or four turns. *Sautés* in first position and *changements* provided a warm-up jump, followed by a simple small allegro combination travelling gradually forward combining *échappés*, *glissade derrière jeté derrière* and *assemblé* over; then *sissonne doublé* and double *tour* for the men (encouraged to use the sequence to include any personal steps of virtuosity) and *grands jetés* for the women; finally *chassé pas de bourrée glissade* "flick" *jeté* zig-zagging across the room from the corner as an expansive finish for everyone. AduB's closing "well done" was greeted with a warm round of applause for her and the pianist Anna Meredith, who had sensitively provided an energising stream of improvised music of appropriate styles and rhythmic structures throughout.

5.7 Northern School of Contemporary Dance Access to HE class 10th November

2017

Context and documentation

Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) in Leeds is a major conservatoire, preparing young dancers for professional life in contemporary dance through a range of courses and degree programmes from Access to Masters level. The courses provide for extensive practical study in dance and other embodied techniques as well as opportunities for performance and choreography including video dance; contextual studies include dance in education and dance pedagogy as well as research and project management, in recognition of the wide range of skills many dancers will need in independent portfolio careers. Ballet classes "tailored to the needs of contemporary dancers" (NSCD 2017 p2) are a compulsory core subject in the curriculum with most dancers doing around three classes a week in addition to their classes in other techniques.

I was invited to sit in on three ballet classes, including second and third year classes for students on the BA (Hons) in Dance (Contemporary) course, being taught that day by Nathalie Leger; but my focus for detailed observation was class taught by Eric Assandri for NSCD's one year Access to Higher Education diploma course. Successful completion of this gives the student a Certa Level 3 qualification, and opens the door to further vocational study at NSCD or other conservatoires such as London Contemporary Dance School, Trinity Laban, Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Scottish School of Contemporary Dance, as well as universities offering dance degrees. Students are selected for this course not on the basis of their previous dance knowledge and experience, but on demonstration of their

potential to benefit from what the course has to offer. The class I watched therefore accommodated a diverse group of 25 students (18 female, 7 male), some with extensive previous experience of ballet, others with none. 8 students volunteered to participate in a brief group interview, and at the end of the day I interviewed their teacher.

Teacher biography

Class teacher Eric Assandri in addition to holding a French Diplôme d'Etat de Professeur de Danse Classique, has teaching qualifications from the University of Leeds and the Royal Academy of Dance for whom he acts as an External Examiner. His early training was in the south of France, moving swiftly from a local ballet teacher to the conservatoire in Nice where he received vocational training in the French school from Lycette Darsonval and Marcelle Cassini, later studying with Rosella Hightower and Marika Besobrasova who gave him an experience of Russian schooling. Dancing professionally for companies in the south of France and then as a soloist in Salzburg, he was fortunate to work on Bournonville repertoire with Dinna Bjørn who invited him to perform this work on tour with a company of dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet. He thus brings to his ballet teaching rich and varied knowledge encompassing different styles and training approaches. This perhaps enables him to help a disparate group of learners to find how they themselves can realise ballet's technical concepts in execution, and dance balletic material both correctly but also with their own individual interpretation.

Class content

The one and a half hour class took place in a windowless interior studio with barres on the walls and two additional lines of portable barre in the centre. A 40 minute barre began with a 6 minute continuous warm-up exercise sequence facing the barre, with *battements tendus*, rises, *pliés* and circling of the upper back first in parallel and then in turn-out. This was followed by *pliés*, *battements tendus* from 1st and 5th positions, *battements glissés*, *ronds de jambe*, *battements fondus*, *battements frappés* with *petits battements*, *grands battements* and a classic ballet stretch with the leg up on the barre to the front and side, and rises facing the barre in 1st and 2nd position.

The work in the centre was directed towards the one mirrored wall, with students often divided into smaller groups for more expansive movement and travelling sequences. A generous *port de bras* was followed by a simple *battement tendu* exercise ending in a *pirouette en dehors*, then significant time was spent on a travelling *enchaînement* with different *pirouettes* and *balancés* done continuously in groups of three. 23 minutes of jumps began with alternating groups doing *changements*; then a *petit allegro* combination of *petits sissones* and *petits assemblés*, and one beginning to travel through *pas de chat*, followed by a bigger allegro with *sissones* and *failli assemblé*. The class ended with a warm-down exercise in parallel, bending forward and unrolling up, stretching hamstrings and calves.

Usually undertaken with piano accompaniment, on this occasion the class was accompanied by a guitarist who provided repeating lyrical riffs with a clear rhythmic underpinning, as well as some suitably contemplative pieces conducive to careful concentration for slower exercises.

5.8 Susie Crow adult beginners' class Autumn Term 2017

Context and documentation

I have been teaching ballet classes for adults at all levels in Oxford for more than 10 years. I took over a popular Saturday morning beginners' class at a local church hall taught by a colleague and subsequently initiated a second beginners' class on Monday afternoons; this has now become established and is popular with older participants who are retired, or those with more flexible work schedules. Some do more than one class in the week; there is a clear perception stated by those who have tried this that the benefit of doing two classes is more than double that of once-a-week attendance, with frequency aiding memory as well as facility, strength and confidence, and therefore enjoyment. Offering two classes in the week also helps those who wish to make the transition from beginners to intermediate level and some recently have successfully done this.

My clientele for this class ranges in age from a few teenagers and university students through to the retired; it has included GPs, a jeweller, a potter, a painter, students in a range of disciplines, teachers, researchers, staff from Oxfam and other charities, full time mothers, administrators, an usher at the Kassam Stadium, a freelance writer, a Bodleian librarian, a legal consultant, an actress, member of the armed forces and emergency services. My oldest dancer is over 80 years of age, and I have had occasional students with serious health conditions including epilepsy, Parkinsons, arthritic toe joints and problems with sight. Almost all are women; there are occasional men, but only rarely more than one at a time. I currently have one transgender student. Levels of ballet experience vary; some are complete beginners while others did ballet as a child and are resuming after long absence, sometimes their enthusiasm rekindled when their own children have gone to ballet class. Others come from other dance or fitness disciplines with a curiosity to try ballet. I have noted an increasing interest in adult ballet over the last few years (possibly following from the success of the film *Black Swan*), to the extent that some of my classes are reaching maximum capacity (around 20 students in a class). I teach three long terms a year.

Being unable to observe or interview myself I documented the class content for the autumn 2017 term in detail, including notes on my intentions in composing and teaching this material. It was not possible to interview members of this shifting group directly after a class because their classes are immediately followed by other classes I teach; so I issued an invitation to all beginners to come to my house informally after the end of term for tea and cakes to participate in the research; I was thus able to interview a self selected group of 9 volunteering regular attenders at some length.

Class content

The classes take place in the local Summertown United Reformed Church Hall, a large community space (7 metres by 14 metres) that is light and quiet, and since 2011 has a durable Harlequin multi-use sprung floor. There are wall mounted barres down the two long sides of the Hall, and two additional portable wooden barres if required. As the church hall is open to a variety of other uses there are no mirrors.

I have no accompanist, compiling playlists from class CDs and using an iPod with portable speaker. I do not follow any set syllabus but compose my own class material in response to what I perceive as the needs and interests of those attending; adult beginners' material is gradually introduced and studied over a whole term of classes. I 'choreograph' the class quite fully in advance, picking music appropriate to studies around a specific technical theme or focus – a piece of vocabulary, movement transition or shape. For this term I drew on movement phrases from *Raymonda* which I was revising prior to teaching a solo from the *Grand Pas* to students at London Studio Centre; as well as picking up on steps that some of the learners had experienced in summer classes with another teacher, and introducing *pas ballonné*, at the barre, in

centre practice and in an allegro sequence.

My adult beginner classes last one hour 15 minutes. Conscious of the age and physical condition of some learners I always start with a gentle standing warm-up, a continuous 10-15 minute sequence without music standing in a circle; I give a running commentary as I do it with them. As well as releasing tensions, warming internally, and mobilizing the torso, it introduces some basic balletic concepts such as the *aplomb*, alignment, oppositions, *en dehors* and *en dedans*, while sensitizing the feet, and focusing attention on the pathways of the movement.

For the autumn 2017 term the barre consisted of a simple preparatory exercise with two hands on the barre followed by *pliés*, *battements tendus*, *battements glissés*, *ronds de jambe*, *battements ballonnés* and *grands battements*. Centre work included a *port de bras* with *chassé pas de bourrée* and *pas marchés*; a combination with *battements tendus*, *ballonné* and *glissade* introducing the concept of *épaulement*; the grand *Raymonda* waltz step that echoed a sequence from the *Grand Pas* entry, including a marked *fouetté sauté* and *balancés* with a hand on the hip; *changements* with a change of direction; and a little travelling allegro including *temps levés*, *pas de chat* and the *ballonné* to change sides. I had prepared more, including a step performed by the Nymphs in *The Sleeping Beauty* which would have used the *glissades* and *ballonnés* learners had worked on, but in the end we did not manage to do more than sample this a couple of times.

I chose music recorded by the experienced Gavin Meredith, who works with Northern Ballet. His class playlists are available online via BalletDigital.com and include an energising and eclectic mix of popular and Latin songs, ballet repertoire, pieces by composers such as Bach and Sibelius and some musical theatre and film themes, as well as his own compositions.

5.9 Anya Grinsted “Back to the Barre” class 2nd January 2018

Context and documentation

I met Anya Grinsted (AG) through a mutual colleague who thought that I would be interested in her work. AG's teaching is deeply informed by the pedagogic principles and beliefs that guided legendary teacher Audrey de Vos. For 23 years AG has been teaching an annual summer school week called *Back to the Barre* which works through initial conditioning exercises devised by de Vos and integrates them into students' ballet class practice through the development of the movement principles emerging. She was very keen that I should come and experience some of this work; and convened a group of five of her students on holiday from vocational training to do a demonstration class which she invited me to observe; one at Elmhurst Ballet School, two studying at Central School of Ballet, one aspiring contemporary dancer who had studied for a term at Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and was on the CAT training scheme at the Place, and one currently at Anna du Boisson's Young Dancers' Academy.

Given my particular interest in the development of artistry Anya arranged a two hour session that did not comprehensively cover all the possible conditioning exercises but gave a sample, and then continued with a ballet class incorporating some of the principles and ideas developed through the conditioning. After the two hour class on which I took notes, and which was also observed by AG's fellow teacher Caroline Hutchings and a couple of parents, I was able briefly to interview the students.

Caroline, AG and I then went to a pub for lunch and wide ranging conversation about the work and current issues in British ballet and training. It felt inappropriate formally to interview Anya on this occasion and in these circumstances, but she was very forthcoming and helpful. I subsequently wrote extensive field notes on all that I could remember of our conversation.

Teacher biography

AG trained at the Royal Academy of Dance and first encountered de Vos' inspirational teaching as a student, going to open afternoon classes at de Vos' studio in Linden Gardens in London. AG went on to have wide experience as a teacher herself, including training vocational students at Elmhurst School of Ballet. She studied de Vos' methods in greater depth with de Vos' assistant Janet Westerberg. In 1995 she ran the first *Back to the Barre* course, at which Janet taught. The courses have continued since then, now taught by AG herself with another de Vos alumna Caroline Hutchings, and including master classes with guest teachers such as Doreen Wells, an enthusiastic supporter of de Vos' work, and Donald MacLeary. In addition to this annual event Anya teaches regular classes in and around Guildford, basing her work at Chilworth Village Hall.

Class content

The nearly two hour format began with approximately 20 minutes spent on 7 conditioning exercises, performed with the legs in parallel in the centre of the room as simple *enchaînements* with music. By the end of this the dancers had shed any tracksuit tops, shorts or warmers to work in leotard and pink tights with the body fully visible. A 40 minute barre ensued with an initial sequence of relaxed leg swings followed by *pliés*, two *battement tendu* exercises incorporating *petits retirés* and transfer of weight, *battements glissés* finishing with a little *relevé* and balance, *ronds de jambe*, *battements frappés*, and two *grands battements* exercises, first forward and back, then to the side incorporating a powerful *relevé* in preparation for *pirouettes*; followed by an opportunity for students to do stretches of their choice. Exercises were short but time was taken for analysis and correction, followed by repetition; de Vos apparently always repeated the exercises at the barre, as did Maggie Black who was greatly influenced by her (Shmueli 2001 p2); and the approach of spending more time on less material to understand and master its detail was particularly evident in the centre.

50 minutes of centrework comprised a *port de bras* with *pas marchés* and *posé arabesque* for balance (16 counts); a sweeping preparation sequence for *pirouette* in *arabesque* (8 counts); a warm up jump focusing on rotation of the legs in the air (16 counts); then 20 minutes spent working in detail on a 16 count allegro *enchaînement* incorporating a variety of small jumps and a polka step; paying attention to *épaulement*, body direction, *ballon*, style and timing. The last *enchaînement* was a simple relaxing combination of *balancés* and upper body *port de bras*, allowing the dancers to end in a pose of their choice. A feature of the material was the inclusion of careful and sometimes very expressive preparatory phrases by way of introduction. For the exercises in the centre AG occasionally consulted a small piece of paper with notes, suggesting that she had pre-prepared at least the centre *enchaînements* for this occasion.

The class was accompanied live by experienced pianist Anthony A'Court who played a selection of pieces with a light touch, including some Latin rhythms, ragtime, lyrical 3/4s and familiar light classical pieces such as Jamaican rumba, a Souza march and a Strauss waltz. AG is not always able to work with live music, but both she and the students were emphatic about the value of live accompaniment and the added

pleasure and expression that it engendered.

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